

M. Asaf Ali

*Memoirs*

The Emergence of Modern India



Kashmir





**M. ASAF ALI'S  
MEMOIRS**

**The Emergence of Modern India**



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## **The Emergence of Modern India**

**With an Introduction by  
Aruna Asaf Ali**

**G.N.S. RAGHAVAN**



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***Aurangzeb's grave is scarcely fifty miles from here. And I often say to myself: 'And the Mughal empire was buried with him.' It is a strange coincidence that, sitting in this fortress-prison of Ahmadnagar, we are witnessing the guttering of the British Power's candle down its socket. The Union Jack is daily hoisted on the bastion which faces us, and a frayed one was changed two days ago. I say to myself: 'This is the last of it. It cannot float in India after this war.'***

**— Entry of 29th September 1942 in Asaf Ali's prison diary at Ahmadnagar Fort. The flag of free India has been flying there since 15th August 1947.**

***"I am having a look at Faizi's translation of the Geeta. There are hundreds of couplets in it which a Muslim cannot for a moment disown. The religion of the Sufis is of the same genre. Here is a confluence... The world is bound to reach this destination, if not today maybe tomorrow, and if not tomorrow the day after. Then they will see whether the differences are, as the eyes ordinarily perceived earlier, as between black and white or, in reality, as the difference between the yellow rose and the red."***

**— Asaf Ali in a letter from Gujarat Jail, Punjab, in May 1941.**



## Preface

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Nothing illustrates better the vividness of subjective experience than our sense of kinship with some whom we have known only through their writings, and through what we have read and heard about them. We feel as comfortable in their incorporeal presence as in the company of the best among friends whom we have known in objectively real life.

Asaf Ali had been dead for 31 years when I first made his acquaintance in 1984, through the pages of Sudhir Pant's biographical sketch.<sup>1</sup> The good companionship thus begun improved steadily over the years through conversations with Aruna Asaf Ali, and through study of the Family Collection<sup>2</sup> of Asaf Ali's Papers. This collection has been preserved with loving care by Syed Asad Ali — son of Kishwar Sultana Begum, a first cousin of Asaf Ali's on the maternal side. The collection includes a large body of hitherto unpublished writing done by Asaf Ali while he was in detention, along with other members of the Congress Working Committee, at Ahmadnagar Fort between August 1942 and March 1945. A part of the writing is on such unusual surfaces (because of the acute shortage of paper during World War II) as the wrappers in which Government publications were delivered, or the blank spaces on postal envelopes which brought letters as cleared, often with deletions, by the wartime censors.

Besides creative works mainly in Urdu, Asaf Ali wrote in English at Ahmadnagar an account of his life and times up to age 32, running into 771 handwritten pages; and a prison diary (654 pages) under the title *Random Jottings*. Published for the first time in this work, the two documents help to illumine the changing social and political scene in India during the first half of the 20th century. Combining the gifts of felicitous narration and personality portraiture, Asaf Ali gives a first-hand account of the freedom struggle from the anti-Rowlatt agitation to 'Quit India'.

Also published here for the first time is the account which Asaf Ali wrote at Cuttack, when he was Governor of Orissa (1948-52), of his experiences as the first Indian ambassador to the U.S.A. During his tenure of about fourteen months from February 1947, India was in transition — under an Interim Government — to the status of a self-governing Dominion and also moved inexorably towards partition. Asaf Ali's narrative affords glimpses into the factors (mainly Jawaharlal Nehru's preference for State ownership and regulation of industries) which prevented the large-scale economic collaboration between the world's two largest democracies which he had looked forward to. Asaf Ali alerted New Delhi as early as in November 1947 about the under-invoicing of exports and the over-invoicing of imports indulged in by the unscrupulous among Indian businessmen. A significant revelation in connection with the hostilities that were to break out between India and China in 1962 is that B.M. Kaul, who as a Lt. Col. was Military Attache at the

Indian embassy in Washington, was already on familiar terms with his kinsman<sup>3</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru in early 1948. (See the concluding part of the section on *Keeping Tuned with Nehru* in Chapter X.) This officer was to shoot into controversial public notice when he was appointed in 1962, in the rank of Lt. General, to head an Army Corps charges with the task of clearing the Chinese from the North East Frontier Agency (as the present Arunachal Pradesh was then known). According to many critics, the direct access of Gen. Kaul to the Prime Minister disrupted the chain of command which is a cardinal principle in military operations. The Army was in any case ill prepared, in terms of men and equipment, for the order given to it by the political leadership. The result was the humiliating reverses suffered by India during the 1962 hostilities. The then Defence Minister, Krishna Menon, had to resign.

Asaf Ali's memoirs are a contribution both to an understanding of contemporary history and to promotion of the basic values that are necessary for sustaining humane relations among people within and between countries. I have tried to present Asaf Ali's life, in both its exterior and interior aspects, in his own words as far as possible, so that the work is as much autobiography as biography. To avoid a clutter of footnotes, I have proceeded on the basis that, in most cases, mention of the date of a statement by Mahatma Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru should be adequate to help the reader, if he wishes, to look up the source item in full in the *Collected Works* in one case and the *Selected Works* in the other. The source of almost all the quotations from Asaf Ali, or from letter to him, is the family Collection. Another valuable source of information has been Asaf Ali Khan of Hyderabad, son of Asaf Ali's close friend Hosain Alikhan (and godson of Asaf Ali). I owe to Asaf Alikhan the correspondence between Asaf Ali and Hosain Alikhan, as well as his own finely narrated recollection of the three weeks that he and his wife spent with Asaf Ali in Switzerland early in 1953.

I received help from three friends who provided me with translations or summaries, in English, of writings in Urdu by or about Asaf Ali : Sardar Gyan Singh; Harbans Bahadur Mathur; and Waheeduddin Ahmad Qazi. I would like to acknowledge also the courtesy and cooperative attitude shown by the Secretary and his colleagues of the Hindi Academy of Delhi, the institution which implemented on behalf of the Delhi Administration this project of a full-length biography of Asaf Ali.

I am indebted above all to Aruna Asaf Ali. I have had the privilege of extended conversations with her on a variety of subjects in the course of our collaborative writing work over the last eight years. These conversations afforded insight into Asaf Ali's personality which I could not have obtained from any other source.

G.N.S. RAGHAVAN

New Delhi





# Introduction

---

The biography of an Indian of any consequence in public life in the first half of the twentieth century is liable to give the impression that the central character is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi rather than the ostensible subject. So it is with this work.

But it is distinctive in treating Gandhiji as a human being, great but fallible, rather than as an immaculate avatar. Biographies written by Indians tend in many cases to read like hagiography. G.N.S. Raghavan approaches Asaf Ali and his great contemporaries with respect but without the sentimentality of hero worship. In this he is in a line that is distinguished by some eminent figures. Annie Besant had the hardihood to warn that Gandhiji's Satyagraha as law-breaking would pile up immense problems for the future governments of a free India. The poet Rabindranath Tagore discountenanced the burning of foreign cloth "before the very eyes of our motherland shivering and ashamed in her nakedness". C. Rajagopalachari had the courage to express in public his view that it was wrong to launch a mass movement in 1942 when Britain was locked in a life-and-death struggle against forces that were distinctly worse and Japan's armies were advancing towards India.

Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and Asaf Ali also felt that the conditions prevailing in 1942 were hardly appropriate for a mass struggle, but they expressed their misgivings in the privacy of discussion in the Congress Working Committee. Asaf Ali was the most emphatic in his disagreement. As Raghavan brings out, he tried to alert Gandhiji about the British rulers' misinterpretation of Congress motives, *vis-a-vis* the Japanese, after the adoption of the Quit India resolution in its original form by the Congress Working Committee at Wardha on 14th July 1942; he urged that the misrepresentation should be countered. Asaf Ali explains why he kept his dissent private: loyalty to the Congress organisation and to his colleagues; and the risk of being misunderstood as wanting to avoid another term of imprisonment. Let me say at once, as one of those who took Gandhiji's injunction 'Do or Die' as our command and plunged

into a struggle which did not remain within the bounds of non-violence, that we were little aware, at the time, of the differences of opinion within the Congress Working Committee that are brought out vividly in the present work.

For a long time I have felt that my husband's contribution to public life in India, both as freedom fighter and as a thinker and writer who propagated humane values, has been insufficiently known—even as my own role has tended to be over-rated. A first attempt to fill this gap in public awareness of a notable patriot and humanist was the brief biographical sketch of Asaf Ali written by Sudhir Pant, and published towards the close of 1984 by the National Book Trust in its National Biography series. It whetted the appetite of at least one reviewer for a full-length study. Referring to Asaf Ali's many-sided personality as scholar, lawyer, nationalist, writer and connoisseur of the arts, Iqbal Singh wrote in *India Weekly* of London, under the title 'Asaf Ali: Waiting for a Biographer': "Surely, we should know more of the man who had such wide interests and was endowed with such catholicity of the spirit."

I am glad that a full-length biography of Asaf Saheb is now available. It was sponsored by the Delhi Administration as part of its contribution to the programme of observing the hundredth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and several other great sons and daughters of India who were born, as in a stellar cluster, in the 1880's. This was appropriate, since Asaf Ali embodied Delhi's urbane and humane culture of the pre-partition era.

Also appropriate was the choice of G.N.S. Raghavan as the author. I first met Raghavan in the latter half of 1984, when he wanted to talk to me in connection with the manuscript of the brief biographical sketch of Asaf Ali in finalising which Krishna Kripalani, then Chairman of the National Book Trust, had sought his help. Over the eight years since then, I have found in Raghavan a person I could talk with freely and frankly, notwithstanding our somewhat different political predilections. He collaborated with me in writing two books: *Private Face of a Public Person: a Study of Jawaharlal Nehru* and *The Resurgence of Indian Women*, both published by the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library. Among the subjects touched on in our conversations during frequent meetings over the years were the circumstances of my first meeting with Asaf, and the joy as well as the strain of a marriage of equals both of whom maintained their individuality. Raghavan discusses with understanding and candour the loneliness of my husband in the last years of his life when I was engrossed in Left-wing politics.

My recollections are but a small part of the information drawn on by Raghavan. While preparing this extensively researched study, he has delved into much source material pertaining to the freedom movement, including Asaf Ali's own writings. An early work that reveals Asaf Ali's ability to apply principles laudable in the abstract to concrete socio-economic situations is entitled *Constructive Non-Cooperation* (1920). Asaf Ali presented in this tract a detailed scheme for a self-governing society that would be largely self-reliant



at local levels and would need but a minimum of regulation by remote authorities at provincial headquarters and the national capital. Out of print for more than half a century, this booklet is reproduced in slightly abridged form in the present work. It is deserving of study by all those who mean what they say when they talk of Panchayati Raj.

Asaf Ali joined M.A. Ansari, a close friend and senior political colleague, in proposing in the early 1920's a *via media* between the vicious system of separate electorates (in which only Muslims chose who should represent them), introduced by the British and gratefully clung to by the self-seeking among the Muslim elite; and the unadulterated nationalism of joint electorates in which every elector, to whichever religious community he belonged, would vote for the best candidate, of whatever community. The two suggested a system of reservation of an appropriate number of seats in the legislatures for Muslims, from territorial constituencies in which every candidate would have to be a Muslim but each of whom would have to seek the favour of voters belonging to all communities. Unfortunately, this approach was not seriously pursued by the Congress.

For 25 years from 1916 when he helped in establishing the Delhi unit of Annie Besant's Home Rule League, Asaf Ali contributed articles regularly to nationalist dailies – the *Bombay Chronicle*, the *Tribune of Lahore*, the *Leader* and subsequently the *Independent* of Allahabad. He also wrote for Urdu literary periodicals. But the largest part of Asaf Ali's writing was done while he was in detention at Ahmadnagar Fort during the Second World War along with other members of the Congress Working Committee. Several of these political detenus applied their enforced leisure, from August 1942 till March 1945, to literary activity. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote *The Discovery of India*, Maulana Azad the celebrated *Ghubar-e-Khatir*, and Narendra Deva his scholarly work on Buddhism. Asaf Ali's extensive writing at Ahmadnagar was in both the creative and expository modes.

Two original literary works in Urdu were *Baghi*, an allegorical play that acknowledges the value of individual self-development but stresses also the need for communitarian living; and *Parchhain*, poems in free verse on the mystery of the relationship between 'I' and 'Thou' and on the transcendence of separateness in communion. The third work in Urdu was a translation, from an English version, of *The Persians* by the Greek dramatist Aeschylus. The very choice of this play for translation is significant. Its theme is the destruction of a large Persian fleet by a much smaller Greek naval force in the battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. Asaf Ali must have been attracted by the humanism of the Greek playwright, whose treatment of the subject is not an exulting celebration of victory; it is a tragedy presented from the viewpoint of the Persians and brings out the waste of war, and the common humanity of the victors and the vanquished. Asaf Ali himself wrote a play in English entitled *Sanjna*. Based on Vedic legend and presented in a modern setting, it is interspersed with com-

ments by the players on the changing status and rights of women.

The largest part of Asaf Ali's writing at Ahmadnagar consists of autobiographical notes covering the period from his childhood years towards the close of the 19th century up to the Nagpur congress of December 1920; and a prison diary which he titled 'Random Jottings'. These include reflections on events in India and in the war-torn world following the adoption of the fateful Quit India resolution by the All India Congress Committee on 8th August 1942; many personal and political recollections relating to earlier years; his activities in the prison camp ranging from gardening during the day, reading and writing and discussion with colleagues, to star-gazing at night; and his impressions of his fellow detents of whom both the best and not the best traits were revealed by close and constant proximity.

Published for the first time in this work, the autobiographical notes and the prison diary afford valuable source material relating to the social and political history of modern India (including, till the time of their emergence, the present Pakistan and Bangladesh.) Asaf Ali writes both as a participant and witness of the process of India's transformation in the first half of the 20th century. His recollections and comments are significant contribution to an understanding of the Hindu-Muslim connection with its bewildering complexity of antagonism and affinity, and of the composite culture that binds and ethnically and linguistically diverse people ordained by history and by geography to live together in one sub-continent.

In sum, the prison writing of Asaf Ali, presented for the first time in this work, reveals a person of a remarkably inclusive humanism. He was receptive to each of the three great streams of the heritage of human thought and culture to which he was heir : that of India, his native land, right from Vedic times; of period in which indigenous pre-Islamic humanism and the Sufi humanism of Islam reinforced each other; and, finally, the encounter with the West, political and cultural, which was the central factor in shaping the personality and values of many of the best Indian during the 20th century.

Raghavan's analysis and comments are incisive. One does not have to concur with all of his views to acknowledge that he is at once thought-provoking and readable. The book is an important contribution to the ongoing debate on what secularism should mean in a democratic and progressive polity. It should be of interest equally to the general reader and to scholars of modern India's history. Above all, the recollection of the humane values that moved Asaf Ali and his great contemporaries might help to revive those values at a time when they are so sadly on the decline in our country.

ARUNA ASAF ALI

New Delhi

# 1. Relevance to our Times

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India, like many other countries, has experienced conflict between different social groups in the course of its history, more especially during the 20th century. The British rulers encouraged separatist feeling among the religious minorities : Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. Within the Hindu fold, the colonial regime exploited to its advantage the social segregation, from so-called Caste Hindus, of the Depressed Classes (the former untouchables now referred to as the Scheduled Castes). The alien rulers also promoted political division, within the Caste Hindu fold, between Brahmins and the non-Brahmin castes. The aggravation of Hindu-Muslim differences by the imperial power and by separatists among Muslim leaders culminated in the partition of the sub-continent in 1947 to form a new State of Pakistan comprising Muslim-majority areas. Thereafter, in what remained of India, social conflict has been kept alive, even accentuated, by irresponsible politicians belonging to various political parties who cynically appeal to religious and caste feeling in order to win votes and thereby to gain power and pelf

Paradoxically, however, a survey of world history over the millennia will reveal no land more hospitable than India to the grafting of religions, and of non-theistic humanist faiths, one upon another for the flowering of an inclusive humanism. This may be defined as acknowledging in principle and trying to realise in practice, the right of all human beings, women no less than men, to equal opportunities for the development of their skills and of their intellectual and creative potential. In no other country has there been a succession of such radical humanists as the Upanishadic sages, Mahavira and the Buddha who rejected the Brahminical caste hierarchy and propagated the ethics of compassion towards fellow creatures, the Bhakti saints and sages of the medieval period and their Sufi counterparts in Indian Islam, Nanak who founded a new religion based on the Bhakti-Sufi fusion, Rammohan Roy who enlarged the scope of Indian humanism by incorporating the best insights of the New Testament in his vision of a Brahmo Samaj, Mahatma Gandhi who was the latest

in the line of egalitarian Hindu Bhaktas, and Jawaharlal Nehru who--whatever the short comings in his practical achievement as free India's first Prime Minister--added the further dimension of socialism as an articulation, by many in his time, of the egalitarian yearning in the context of the industrial age. There can be no doubt that it is only by reviving and strengthening this tradition of an inclusive humanism transcending natal differences of race, religion, gender and class that India can overcome its present ills.

Not the least part of the relevance of Asaf Ali (1888-1953) to our times is that he proudly acknowledged the Indian heritage of humanism spanning more than three millennia from Vedic times to his own day. It was humanism that made him a nationalist Muslim, in contrast to the separatists. He acknowledged the brotherhood of all Indians (as of all men), and not only of Muslims. But Asaf Ali was more than a nationalist who played a part of some importance in the freedom struggle. As a poet and thinker he was strongly attracted not only by the great writers of Urdu, Persian and English but by Sanskrit literature and the speculations of the philosophers of ancient India, so much so that, as Aruna Aaf Ali recalls, some of her husband's close friends would refer to him jestingly as 'Pandit' Asaf Ali. Through his life-work and his writings in Urdu and in English (most of the latter are published for the first time in this book), Asaf Ali has made his own contribution to the growth of a multi-dimensional humanism.

### **Pride in Sanskrit Heritage**

Vedic mythology is drawn on by Asaf Ali in his English play 'Sanjna' (Evening Twilight personified). There is poetic insight in Asaf Ali's reading of the allegorical meaning of the Churning of the Milk-Ocean (see *Interpreting Tilak and Ksheera-sagara* in Chapter V). Responsive to the poetry of myth and legend, Asaf Ali at the same time cautioned against superstition and the tendency to romanticise the past.

In this openness to the heritage of culture irrespective of what is one's religion by birth, Asaf Ali was in worthy company within and outside India. Early in the 11th century, Firdausi wrote the *Shahnama* in Persian at the instance of Mahmud of Ghazni. Ranked by some scholars among the world's five great epics – the others being the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Greece and the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* of India – Firdausi's poem celebrates Persian heroes like Sohrab and Rustam who flourished much before the emergence of Islam and the conquest of Persia by Muslim Arabs. Edmund Spenser of 16th-century England drew on the pre-Christian Arthurian legends for his romantic epic, 'Faerie Queene', which espoused patriotism.

The impact of the two Indian epics on South East Asia over the centuries, specially in architecture and ballet, is well known. Two anecdotes recalled by

G. Parthasarathi, who was India's ambassador to Indonesia during 1957-58, throw a flood of light on the enduring influence of the Mahabharata and of the Sanskrit language even after the people of the archipelago were converted to Islam. When the Indian ambassador presented his credentials, President Soekarno looked thoughtfully at the name and remarked: "Partha is Arjuna, and Sarathi is charioteer. So you are really Krishna!" Mohammad Hatta as Vice President of Indonesia was due to visit India, and the ambassador met him to discuss the proposed itinerary. Included in the programme was a meeting with some Indian Maulvis. Hatta looked puzzled. After Parthasarathi explained that the term referred to Muslim divines, he exclaimed: "Oh! You mean Maha Gurus! Yes, yes." The very name of the first President of free Indonesia is revealing. Soekarno is a variant of 'Sukarna'. According to Kamala Ratnam, wife of another Indian ambassador to Indonesia, the name was coined by the father who was a keen Mahabharata scholar and was attracted in particular by the personality of Karna, the generous-souled warrior. But he was not happy that Karna should have ranged himself on the side of the unrighteous Kauravas. Wanting his son to be a 'good Karna', he named him 'Sukarna'.

In the course of the comments invited by Jawaharlal Nehru on his manuscript of the *The Discovery of India* (in 1944 when both were in detention at Ahmadnagar Fort along with other members of the Congress Working Committee), Asaf Ali speaks of how almost the entire grammatical structure, and much of the vocabulary, of Urdu is derived from Sanskrit. He advocates the popularisation of an easy-to-learn 'Basic Sanskrit'. (*A Shared Discovery of India*, Chapter VIII). Asaf Ali also says that he is "prepared to back even one of the earliest Sanskrit plays, Shudraka's *Mrchhakatika* (The Clay Cart), and most certainly Kalidasa, against the best of Greek plays." This was saying a great deal, because Asaf Ali admired ancient Greek drama and rendered into Urdu, from English, 'The Persians' by Aeschylus (*Greek Drama for the Urdu Reader*, Chapter XIV).

Another instance of Asaf Ali's catholicity pertains to Christianity. As a morally sensitive individual would be, whatever his religion by the accident of birth, Asaf Ali was deeply affected by the teaching and example of Jesus. During Christmas of 1944, when he was held in detention at Ahmadnagar Fort, he would hear day after day the toll of the bell from the Army's Church. He wrote on this occasion several poems in English – instead of his mother tongue Urdu, which he had decided by the age of twenty-five was to be his medium for creative expression. These poems in English are available in the Asaf Ali Papers (Family Collection) only in the first draft, uncorrected as noted by Asaf Ali on the typed copy made in Cuttack when he was Governor of Orissa. Though generally florid in language, they have some lines that are striking both for the thought and feeling, and for the way they are expressed. Following is an extract:

The Prince of Peace was born to direct hits  
 By super-fortress raiders in the zones  
 Of Christian nations, and the groans  
 Of dying men and women. That's redemption.  
 Two thousand years of slaughter, since Ascension,  
 Of man by man among the Christian nations  
 Have failed to spell one syllable of Peace.  
 His crucifixion lasts from birth to birth.

Asaf Ali had a sense of the religious but he cherished a set of values that were personal, rather than the creed and ritual of an institutionalised religion. Except during the years of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movement, when he sported a beard and tried both to influence Muslim opinion and to convey Muslim sentiment to Gandhiji (*Visit to Deoband: Cow and Khilafat*, Chapter V), Asaf Ali did not observe the rituals which are mandatory for the orthodox. But he was respectful towards those who did observe them (*Cameos: Syed Mahmud*, Chapter VIII). A rather similar attitude was articulated by Boris Yeltsin, the first democratically elected President of post-Stalinist Russia, in September 1991 when he said: "The services, the ritual aspect, I don't really observe those, although I have been in church quite often because during the service there is a kind of internal feeling of moral cleansing, as it were...not to mention my respect for believers."

One of Asaf Ali's close friends in Delhi was a Sufi, Khwaja Hasan Nizami who was at that time the chief of the *dargah* of Nizamuddin Aulia of the 13th century. Nizamuddin Aulia was a disciple of Baba Farid, and was in his turn the preceptor of the celebrated musician and poet Amir Khusro. Sufis like Nizamuddin Aulia and, before him, Moinuddin Chisti of the 12th century were hospitably received because the best men of India, from the Upanishadic sages of the pre-Christian era to the Bhakti saints of the medieval period, taught the people to respect human worth irrespective of race, creed and gender. Though the Aryan-Dravidian encounter that began around 2000 B.C. had been initially hostile, it developed into a synthesis, with much racial mixing. The composite culture and religion that emerged from this interaction were designated by outsiders as Hinduism because of the name 'Hindu' given by them to the people of the land of the river Sindhu (pronounced in Persian with an aspirate), or Indus (Indos in Greek) from which the name India is derived. This religion of India, spanning the sub-continent from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari at the southern tip, had a certain measure of tolerance built into it if only because of the multiplicity of gods and goddesses. It is typical of the Indian gift of syncretism that Parvati, wife of the pre-Aryan deity Siva, was declared to be and is worshipped to this day as the sister of the Aryan deity Vishnu.

Sufism presented the gentle and tolerant face of Islam, instead of the brutal and fanatical visage of invaders like Mahmud of Ghazni. When conversion to Islam in India was not at the point of the sword or from hope of material

advancement by adopting the faith of the new rulers, it was because of the appeal of the saintliness of Sufi mystics. Another factor in unforced conversions was the hope of the lowest of the so-called low castes among Hindus, of securing freedom from the social indignity and insult which they had to suffer at the hands of every caste above them in the brahminical hierarchy. (It is a different matter that this hope was most often belied, whether it was Islam that victims of the caste system embraced during Muslim rule or, subsequently, Christianity during British rule.)

The mingling of Islamic Sufism and Hindu Bhakti, in which good men of the two faiths reached out to each other, gave rise to a new religion, Sikhism, based on the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1538). Though Sikhism was a proselytising religion, and was gaining adherents from the ranks both of Hindus and of Muslims, the broad-minded Mughal emperor Akbar did not regard the new religion as a threat to Islam or to the State. He admired the saintly lives of the Sikh Gurus of his time. Akbar also arranged for translation into Persian of the Atharva Veda, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. According to the historian Abdul Qadir Badauni, a contemporary who was an orthodox Sunni and disapproved of Akbar's eclecticism which he regarded as un-Islamic, Akbar prohibited the killing of cows since it offended Hindu sentiment, refrained from eating meat on certain days, and celebrated non-Islamic festivals.

Aruna Asaf Ali recalls how her husband used to remark on the difference that might have been made to the history of India had Akbar's grandson Shah Jahan been succeeded by the liberal-minded Dara Shikoh rather than Aurangzeb. When Shah Jahan fell ill in September 1657, a war of succession broke out between his four sons: Dara, Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad. Aurangzeb, who combined religious fanaticism with ruthlessness in the pursuit of power, emerged the victor. Crowning himself emperor in Delhi in 1658, he had Dara executed the following year after getting him condemned by the Mullahs for deviation from the Islamic faith and parading the prince in disgrace through the streets of Delhi. Murad's turn for execution came in 1661. The dethroned Shah Jahan – kept imprisoned in Agra fort under harsh conditions – breathed his last in 1666. Forced to drink brackish water from the wells within the fort though the river Jamuna was nearby, the unhappy emperor wrote to Aurangzeb:

Praised be the Hindus in all cases,  
As they ever offer water to their dead.  
And thou, my son, art a marvellous Mussalman  
As thou causest me in life to lament for water.<sup>1</sup>

In 1675, angered by Guru Teg Bahadur's support to the Hindus of Kashmir in their resistance to oppressive measures, Aurangzeb caused the Sikh divine to be brought to Delhi where he was asked to choose between death and conversion. Preferring to die rather than recant his faith, the Guru was beheaded. The martyrdom of Teg Bahadur, which enraged the Sikhs, was

followed in 1679 by the reimposition of the Jizya tax on the entire non-Muslim majority of the population. The Mughal empire was riven by conflicts with Rajput, Sikh and Maratha rulers. A disunited India became vulnerable to penetration and eventual conquest by European powers.

Dara Shikoh spent much time in the company of Sufis – one of the reasons for Aurangzeb's dislike of him. A Sufi mystic who was a friend and mentor of Dara Shikoh was Sarmad. He was put to death in 1657 on the orders of Aurangzeb. Sarmad came to India from Iran initially as a merchant. According to Bankey Behari, he was "a companion of emperor Shah Jahan and tutor of Prince Dara whom he taught the Upanishads and the Bhagwad Gita."<sup>2</sup> An echo of Vedic pantheism can be heard in Sarmad's invocation:

You manifest Your glory in innumerable forms,  
Sometimes in the hyacinth, sometimes in the cypress,  
and oftener in jasmine are You seen;  
In the mountains, in the desert and in the garden  
You lie hid.  
And at other times You turn into the light  
of the lamp and scatter effulgence.

Sarmad asked those who came to hear him:

Why do you seek His abode only in the temple  
and the mosque?  
See you not His creation above and below? Wherein  
does he not abide?

Sarmad accepted and respected the gods and heroes of the land of his adoption. A saying attributed to him is that he had passed from Jewish faith into Islam and had wandered from Islam "into the garden of Sri Rama and Laxman".

Dara Shikoh also held in high esteem Mullah Shah Badakhshani (d. 1661) of the Qadiri order. Dara says in the preface to his translation into Persian of a selection of Upanishadic verses (referring to himself in the third person) that, in 1640, "he went to Kashmir, the resemblance of paradise, and by the grace of God and the favour of the Infinite, he obtained the auspicious opportunity of meeting the most perfect of perfects, the flower of the gnostics, the unitarian accomplished in the Truth, Mullah Shah." Dara found that Advaita or non-duality among Hindus was manifest from "their heavenly books which are the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda...And it can also be ascertained from the holy Quran that there is no nation without a prophet and without a revealed scripture...The summum bonum of these four books are called the Upanishads...He (Dara) obtained from these the essence of the most ancient of all heavenly books in point of time. Happy is he who...shall study and comprehend this translation entitled *Sirr-i-Akbar* (The Great Secret), knowing it to be a translation of the words of God."<sup>3</sup> It was from a Latin and subsequently French translation of Dara Shikoh's Persian rendering that the West came to know the Upanishads for the first time. M. Mujeeb in his book



*The Indian Muslims* says of Dara: "What he represents socially is the culmination of that understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims of which Akbar laid the foundation...The translation of the Upanishads was not due to literary curiosity, like the translations of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and other works of Sanskrit literature made in Akbar's time and earlier; it was the result of a passionate search for truth."

### **Bhakti-Sufism and Secularism**

In his *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, 'The Mingling of the Two Oceans', Dara Shikoh expounded the fundamental unity of the teachings of Hinduism and Islam, observing that the difference was only in terminology. This work has been preserved in the Persian as well as in a Sanskrit version known as *Samudra-sangama-grantha*. No wonder that a biographer of this worthy great-grandson of Akbar has said: "Anyone who intends to take up the solution of the problem of religious peace in India must begin the work where Dara had left it, and proceed on the path chalked out by that prince."<sup>4</sup>

For the leaders of India's freedom movement spearheaded by the Congress, there could have been no better strategy for countering the British imperial policy of divide-and-rule, and the alien feeling fomented by Muslim separatist leaders, than to revive the Bhakti-Sufi ethos of unity among Hindus and Muslims. But this was not attempted by the three most prominent leaders of the national movement in its final phase – Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) and Maulana Azad (1888-1958). The reason was different in each case.

Gandhiji employed religious idiom and gave utterance again to the message of the Bhakti saints and sages in the context of the problems of our age. Employing his own humanist reinterpretation of the Hindu scriptures, he appealed to the Hindu masses – over the heads of pundits, chiefs of mutts and other spokesmen of orthodoxy. He crusaded for the abolition of untouchability and the throwing open of temples to the so-called untouchables; for women's education and the raising of the age of marriage, and remarriage of child widows; and the exercise of power by the privileged – whether princely rulers (and, subsequently, elected Ministers), or landlords and industrialists – as trustees of the wellbeing of the unprivileged instead of for self-aggrandizement; and for Hindu-Muslim unity in the spirit of human brotherhood. Gandhiji made more radical, and gave a mass dimension to, the movement of social reform and national regeneration initiated by Rammohun Roy (1772-1833).

However, Gandhiji did not address the Muslim masses directly, over the heads of the imams and mullahs and others who upheld Muslim orthodoxy, to exhort them in the name of the Sufi saints to reject separatism. He thought that reform of the outlook of the Muslims should be left to Muslim leaders. Gandhiji's attitude in this matter is explained by his philosophy of Swadeshi.

He defined this as "that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion, that is, the use of my immediate religious surroundings. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of all its defects." (Address deprecating proselytism at Christian missionary conference in Madras, 14th February 1916.)

To India's misfortune, there were no counterparts in the Muslim community comparable to Gandhiji in moral authority and in courage, to undertake a similar crusade for Muslim social reform and for Hindu-Muslim unity in the struggle for freedom. Reformers who did arise in the Muslim community, like Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-98) derived their inspiration from the industrialising West and not from the Sufi tradition. They advised their fellow-religionists to take to modern scientific education and seek their advancement under British patronage, and to keep aloof from the national movement.

Gandhiji hoped that his identification with the brothers Shaukat Ali (1873-1938) and Mohammad Ali (1878-1931) in their movement for the preservation of the Turkish Khilafat, and the espousal of that cause by nationalist Hindus, would win the hearts of Muslims and lay the basis for lasting Hindu-Muslim unity. The hope was sadly belied (*Upsurge of Islamism*, Chapter V).

Maulana Mohammad Ali, the more tirelessly articulate of the two brothers, began by entertaining great regard for Gandhiji for his high moral standards. But since for him Islam was above all, he soon became a Muslim zealot. Indian Muslims, by and large, turned against Britain not because they were moved by patriotic feeling to want to drive out the British colonialists, but primarily because they felt outraged by Britain's war against Turkey whose ruler they regarded as the Khalif of the Muslim community world-wide – like the Pope at one time in relation to the Roman Catholic Church. (For Indian Communists, similarly, World War II which broke out in September 1939 became a "people's war" when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941). Pan-Islamism, like Marxist Communism and other creeds which are not inclusively humanist, limited its concept of brotherhood to the adherents of a particular faith. It was not a true transcendence of nationalism which ought to mean acceptance of the entire family of man as one. Nationalism, since it implies good-neighbourliness towards all fellow-nationals, is (unless it turns into chauvinism) humane compared to any brand of fanatical internationalism.

The fundamental Islamism of Maulana Mohammad Ali was evident at the very session of the Indian National Congress, at Kakinada in December 1923, over which he had been elected to preside. An incident that occurred at the start of the proceedings is narrated by the biographer of Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. The renowned musician was present at the session and was invited to sing the national song, 'Vande Mataram'. Mohammad Ali, who was in the chair, "raised an objection on the ground that music was taboo to his religion. The

leaders assembled were completely bewildered. Vishnu Digambar was incensed, and hit back: 'This is a national forum, not the platform of any single community. This is no mosque, to object to music...When the President could put up with music in the presidential procession, why does he object to it here?' Having silenced the President...he proceeded to sing Vande Mataram and completed it...The people admired his moral courage and applauded him heartily."<sup>5</sup>

In the course of the presidential address at Kakinada (the longest perhaps in Congress history, running into more than a hundred printed pages) occurs a suggestion by Mohammad Ali that Hindus and Muslims might engage in competitive proselytisation of the Depressed Classes. He assumed, as the British authorities did, that these Classes were not Hindus. Mohammad Ali said: "Another movement that has affected Hindu-Muslim relations is Shuddhi. I myself believe in a missionary religion, and by a missionary religion should be taken to mean one in which, in the words of Professor Max Muller, the spreading of the truth and the conversion of unbelievers are raised to the rank of a sacred duty...Christianity and Buddhism as well as Islam are known to be missionary religions, but Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Hinduism are generally regarded as non-missionary...

"It will be strange, then, if today when there are evidences of a missionary zeal in the activities of my Hindu brethren, I should resent their efforts in spreading their faith. More than that, if the Malkana Rajputs are in reality so unfamiliar with Islam as to be taken for Hindus, Musalmans must thank Hindu missionaries for so forcibly reminding them of their own duty to look to the condition of millions of Musalmans whose knowledge of Islam is as defective as their practice of its rites is slack.

"It has been suggested to me by an influential and wealthy gentleman who is able to organise a missionary society on a large scale for the conversion of the Suppressed Classes, that it should be possible to reach a settlement with leading Hindu gentlemen and divide the country into separate areas where Hindu and Muslim missionaries could respectively work, each community preparing for each year, or longer unit of time if necessary, an estimate of the number it is prepared to absorb or convert. These estimates would of course be based on the number of workers and funds each had to spare, and tested by the actual figures of the previous period. In this way each community would be free to do the work of absorption. I cannot say in what light my Hindu brethren will take it, and I place this suggestion tentatively in all frankness and sincerity before them."

As the years passed, Mohammad Ali became more and more of an Islamist. He said he was "impelled by the love I bear towards Mahatmajī to pray to God that He might illumine his soul with the true light of Islam." Gandhiji respected the sincerity of his colleague's faith to the point that he took no exception to, indeed approved of, the following statement of Mohammad Ali: "As a follower

of Islam I am bound to regard the creed of Islam as superior to that professed by the followers of any non-Islamic religion. And in this sense the creed of even a fallen and degraded Mussalman is entitled to a higher place than that of any other non-Muslim irrespective of his high character, even though the person in question be Mahatma Gandhi himself."

Mohammed Ali clung to the Islamic social code as customarily interpreted. The Sarda Bill prohibiting child marriage and a Bill seeking to legalise civil marriage between members of different religious denominations were stoutly opposed by him. He condemned them as interference in Islam.

Being quite unlike the Sufis, the Ali Brothers could not help in uniting Hindus and Muslims, as Gandhiji had hoped they would.

As for Maulana Azad, he was deeply versed in Islamic theology and had a liberal outlook. But Maulana Azad was not an unqualified enthusiast of the Bhakti-Sufi tradition. Many saints in this tradition, both Muslim and Hindu, adored God in personified forms such as of Rama or Krishna and did not restrict themselves to a formless One God. Maulana Azad saw Indian Advaita as being identical with the Islamic concept of One God,<sup>6</sup> but he disapproved of popular Hinduism with its pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Maulana Azad's liberalism is seen in his interpretation, as a general principle supportive of the co-existence of different religions, of the basis on which Prophet Mohammad (570-632) made a tactical alliance with certain non-Muslim tribes of Medina after he moved there from Mecca in 622 (the year from which the Muslim era is reckoned): "To us our faith, to you yours." But Maulana Azad drew a line; he commended the tolerance only of other monotheistic faiths. Both the revolutionary import and the limitation of Maulana Azad's thought are brought out by Prof. M. Mujeeb in his book on *The Indian Muslims*. He presents Maulana Azad's 'maturest thought' as it appears in the *Tarjuman-ul-Quran* (1931): "There are in every society those who refuse to believe. This refusal can either be passive and due to lack of understanding, or desire to follow the ancestral faith (of polytheism and idolatry), or the refusal can take an active and aggressive form. Both kinds of refusal amount to *kufir*. In regard to the first, the injunction of the Quran is to accept disagreement: 'To you your faith and to us ours.' Against *kufir* of the second kind, a struggle may be unavoidable and may even become obligatory, depending on the degree of the aggressiveness..."

"The Quranic concept is comprehensive enough to include all forms of monotheism....But what of religions like Hinduism? Maulana Azad rejects its polytheistic and idolatrous elements...Maulana Azad regrets the fact that Hindus who knew better have, throughout history, been willing to make compromises with, or take for granted as the fate of the ignorant, forms of belief that were polytheistic or idolatrous. This is a kind of tolerance which he does not consider virtuous or even morally justifiable." Maulana Azad lacked wide tolerance of a Vivekananda, who deprecated image worship ("If

cannot see God in the human face, how can you see him in the clouds or in images made of dull, dead matter?"), and yet deprecated denunciation of such worship: "If you are fit to worship God-Without-Form, discarding any external help, do so, but why do you condemn others who cannot do the same?"

However, Maulana Azad recognised the importance of inculcating among the young the ethical values and moral conduct which are stressed by all religions. Soon after joining the Interim Government as Minister in charge of Education, he said in the course of a Press conference in February 1947: "The religious instruction imparted in India in private institutions is of a kind which, instead of broadening the outlook and inculcating a spirit of toleration and goodwill towards all men, produces exactly the opposite results. The aim of all religious teaching should be to make men more tolerant and broad-minded. And it is my opinion that this can be more effectively done if the State takes charge of the question than if it is left to private initiative."

It was hardly to be expected that the Congress-League Interim Government, a house deeply divided, would act on the lines proposed by Maulana Azad and reconstruct the curriculum so as to make a broadminded introduction to the religions of the world, and more especially of India – which would have necessarily included the teaching of the Bhakti-Sufi sages – a compulsory part of education in schools and colleges run by or aided by the State.

The Government of partitioned India, diminished in territory but free, continued to have Maulana Azad as Education Minister and Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister. Azad said on 13th January 1948 at the 14th session of the Central Advisory Board of Education, the first to be held after independence: "At first it was considered that religions would stand in the way of the free intellectual development of a child, but now it has been admitted that religious education cannot altogether be dispensed with. If national education was devoid of this element, there would be no appreciation of moral values or moulding of character on human lines...What will be the consequence if the Government undertake to impart purely secular education? Naturally people will try to provide religious education to their children through private sources. How these private sources are working today or are likely to work in future is already known to you. I know something about it and can say that not only in villages but even in cities, the imparting of religious education is entrusted to teachers who, though literate, are not educated. To them religion means nothing but bigotry...No doubt a foreign government had to keep itself away from religious education. But a national government cannot divest itself of undertaking this responsibility."

The Education Minister reckoned without his Prime Minister. Educated by English tutors at Allahabad, and then in England at Harrow School and Trinity College, Jawaharlal Nehru was an agnostic with an inclination towards Marxism. Nehru was secular in the Western sense of the term and made secularism (which Gandhiji never advocated) part of free India's political

vocabulary. Bhakti and Sufism did not attract Nehru's interest. Sufism does not figure in Nehru's *Glimpses of World History*; and in the later work, *The Discovery of India*, there is only a glancing reference to Sufism, and no mention at all of Dara Shikoh. Since Nehru discusses various Mughal personalities at some length, the reason could be (Dara Shikoh lost the war of succession) "a certain contempt for the weak" which Nehru notes as part of his make-up in the candid self-portrait that he wrote in 1937.<sup>7</sup> Did not Edward Thompson twit his friend about his 'Napoleon worship'?<sup>8</sup> But the more likely reason is that Jawaharlal Nehru was unaware of Dara Shikoh's significance in the cultural history of India. Though many of New Delhi's roads that were formerly named after British monarchs and their colonial agents were renamed during Jawaharlal Nehru's prime ministership, neither in those seventeen years nor subsequently has any road been named for Dara Shikoh till the time of this writing in mid-1992. Among the Mughals commemorated by road names in India's capital are the invader Babar and the fanatic Aurangzeb, and mercifully also Akbar.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Jawaharlal Nehru disregarded his Education Minister's advice. Nehru likewise disregarded the identical advice tendered subsequently by the Commission on University Education which gave its report in 1949. Headed by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the Commission said on the subject of religious instruction, beginning with a reference to the Constitution of the Indian Republic that was being finalised by the Constituent Assembly: "There is no State religion. The State must not be partial to any one religion. Each one is at liberty to approach the unseen as it suits his capacity and inclination. All the different forms are given equal place, provided they do not lead to corrupt practices. If that is the basis of our Secular State, to be secular is not to be religiously illiterate. It is to be deeply spiritual." The Commission recommended that the educational curriculum should include "a reverent study of the essentials of all religions...as a step towards harmony between religions long divided. This is in consonance with the spirit of our country."

What does cause surprise is that Jawaharlal Nehru should have acquiesced in certain provisions of the Constitution which came into force on 26th January 1950 which prohibit religious instruction in State-run educational institutions but permit it in schools and colleges run by religious minorities. These provisions<sup>9</sup> amount to permitting instruction in *one* religion in schools and colleges run by religious minorities, while denying *any* religious instruction to students – the great majority – attending State-run educational institutions. This is clearly contrary to secularism, which requires non-discriminatory treatment of all citizens irrespective of their religious affiliation.

Jawaharlal Nehru himself combined a keen ethical sensibility with indifference to god-based religions. But not everyone who professes secularism is endowed with ethical consciousness. An agnostic secularist, like a believer, can be a good man or a thorough-paced scoundrel, with the difference that the fear

of God may occasionally overtake the believer who indulges in knavery. Education promotive of humane ethical values and a discriminating understanding of the religions (and ideologies) of man does seem a better foundation for a just and peaceful society than religious illiteracy or indoctrination in any one religion. What has happened over the years in Kashmir Valley – and for that matter in the country as a whole – should serve as a warning. Indoctrination in Islam of a fanatical kind in some 200 schools run by the Jamaat-e-Islami is one of the reasons for the rise of secessionist and insurrectionary forces in Kashmir. And among the factors responsible for the steep decline over the post-independence decades in standards of probity in public life, among Ministers and other politicians, administrators and even the judiciary, is education unrelated to ethical values.

The continuing relevance of the Bhakti-Sufi heritage for ending strife in the name of religion was brought out by a leading Indian Muslim journalist, Saeed Naqvi, in the course of a newspaper article (*Patriot*, 24th May 1990). He wrote it in response to a speech delivered by Lal Krishna Advani, the Bharatiya Janata Party leader, at a gathering of volunteers of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh at Coimbatore. Naqvi says towards the close of the article: "But everything is not lost. Yes, folks in Jama Masjid (Delhi) and Charminar (Hyderabad) and Malappuram<sup>10</sup> are evolving outside the pale of the Ramayana. Just as the Swayamsevaks you addressed in Coimbatore are growing up without any knowledge of Dara Shikoh. If this continues, we shall have institutionalised apartheid...It does not have to be that way. Traditions and customs that are dear to you and me are alive in India." The continuity of these traditions was strikingly demonstrated during the telecast in the late 1980's of the widely popular serial on the Mahabharata epic. The script was written by a Muslim, the Urdu poet Rahim Massoom Reza.

Asaf Ali might have made a greater contribution as a writer if politics had claimed less of his time. His writing both in English and Urdu, whether expository or creative, is such that more of it would have helped to spread the ethos necessary for sustaining tolerance and humane values in public life. One nationalist Muslim more or less in the Central Legislative Assembly or in the Congress party's councils would not have made much difference. More valuable would have been a sustained exposition of the theme of human brotherhood in the spirit of the Vedantic and Sufi heritage of India. Asaf Ali said in the course of a letter in May 1941 to his friend Mullah Wahidi, editor of *Adib*: "I am having a look at Faizi's translation of the Geeta. There are hundreds of couplets in it which a Muslim cannot for a moment disown. The religion of the Sufis is of the same genre. Here there is a confluence of Hindustan and Islamistan. The world is bound to reach this destination, if not today maybe tomorrow, and if not tomorrow the day after." (*Religions and the Family of Man*, Chapter XIV.) In the expression of this humanist faith, Asaf Ali drew on imagery native to the Indian soil (as in *Parchhain* when Ganga and Yamuna

converse as they move towards their confluence or in his play *Sanjna* which is based on Vedic mythology.) Asaf Ali's work invites comparison with the writings of the early Mohammad Iqbal (1873-1938). Had Asaf Ali been vouchsafed the opportunity of a more extensive employment of his gifts, he might well have proved a worthy successor to the early Iqbal as a poet and humanist thinker.

The best known of Iqbal's early poems is *Tarana-i-Hindi* (Indian Anthem), opening with the celebrated line: "Sare jahan se achha Hindustan hamara" (which may be translated roughly as, 'Best of all lands in the world is our Hindustan.') Later, after Iqbal had become an Islamist and separatist, he wrote a Muslim Anthem (*Tarana-i-Milli*) condemning territorial patriotism as un-Islamic. He says in the course of this poem:

The biggest among these new gods is native land...  
It divides the people of God into nations,  
It cuts at the root of Islamic nationhood.

Though Iqbal came to disown Indian nationalism, post-partition India has not disowned him. As M. Mujeeb remarks in *The Indian Muslims*: "The feeling with which he (Iqbal) wrote the Indian Anthem was so genuine that in spite of political changes the song is still popular in India."

The syncretist and humane philosophy of the early Iqbal is expressed best in *Naya Shivala* (The New Temple) in which we can hear the accents of Sarmad the Sufi as well as of modern nationalism:

I shall tell the truth, O Brahman, but take it  
not as an offence:  
The idols in thy temple have decayed.  
Thou hast learnt from those images to bear  
ill-will to thine own people.  
And God has taught the Islamic preacher  
the ways of strife.  
My heart was sick: I turned away both from  
the temple and the Ka'bah,  
From the sermons of the preacher and from  
thy fairy tales, O Brahman.  
To thee, images of stone embody the divine  
For me, every particle of my country's  
dust is a deity.  
Come, let us remove all that causes estrangement,  
Let us reconcile those that have turned away from  
each other, remove all signs of division.  
Desolation has reigned for long in the  
habitation of my heart  
Come, let us build a new temple in our land.



The transformation of Iqbal from a nationalist to a separatist was matched by a similar change in Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Curiously, both Iqbal who in 1930 envisaged a Muslim State, and Jinnah who sponsored the Pakistan resolution in 1940 and succeeded within seven years in breaking India in the name of Islam, were born of forefathers who were Hindus converted to Islam. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of Indian Muslims are descendants neither of foreign invaders nor immigrants but of local converts.

Unfortunately there has been a decline in the appeal of Sufism among Indian Muslims over the centuries, and a corresponding increase in the hold of the narrow and exclusivist beliefs and attitudes promoted by the generality of mullahs, imams and qazis. This has been accompanied by the rise of a modernised middle class – among Muslims as in all other communities – whose driving force is not religious devotion but ambition for political power and wealth.

### **Loneliness of the Nationalist Muslim**

The interests of this new emerging class among Muslims were sedulously promoted by the British administration in order to drive a wedge between them and the Hindus (*Minorityism as Imperial Policy*, Chapter V). The franchise was at that time restricted to those with educational and property qualifications. The inducements held out by the British rulers secured the gratitude and loyalty of the beneficiaries who were drawn from the upper crust of Muslim society.

Nationalist Muslims like Dr. M.A. Ansari<sup>11</sup> called for adult franchise along with joint electorates. Since the inducement of preferential recruitment to the government services would have little relevance to the poor and illiterate masses, whether Hindu or Muslim, it was expected that with adult franchise the common people would exercise their political choice on the basis of economic and social programmes rather than religious affiliation.

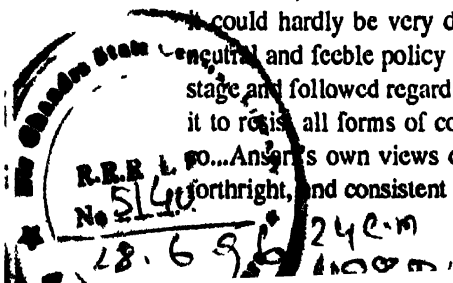
But there was no likelihood of the British rulers introducing territorial constituencies for people's representation in the legislatures, as in Britain, or granting adult suffrage. Nationalist Muslims like Asaf Ali and M.A. Ansari therefore suggested a compromise. In 1924, at a Delhi provincial Congress Conference at Meerut, Asaf Ali commended the scheme for reservation of a certain number of seats for Muslims in the legislatures, with the choice between competing Muslim candidates being made by the electorate as a whole. M.A. Ansari gave concrete shape to this approach in what came to be known as the Ansari Formula. Reservation was a *via media* between totally separate and wholly joint electorates. But the Congress did not pursue this third alternative with seriousness or vigour. Instead, it opted for appeasement of Muslim separatism as immediate policy while paying lip service to joint electorates and secular democracy as the ultimate ideal (*Muslim Separatism: Congress Ambivalence*, Chapter VII).

An early and strong protest against the tendency of the Congress to appease Muslim communal separatists was voiced by A.M. Khwaja, a prominent Congressman of the United Provinces. He wrote on 12th March 1931 to Gandhiji, when the latter expressed his readiness to compromise on separate electorates: "It means that you are prepared to surrender the Congress Muslims who have fought the battles of the country side by side with you, to those Mussalmans who have done nothing except for themselves, their seats, their posts, their salaries and their lunches and dinners at the Government Houses...So far they (Congress Muslims) have fought against the Government and against the self-seekers of their own community...If now they are thrown overboard by the Congress or by you, they must either clear out of the field altogether or must henceforth fight against the Congress." (Quoted by Mushirul Hasan in his biography, *A Nationalist Conscience: M.A. Ansari, Congress and the Raj*, Manohar, 1987.)

Ansari's biographer writes: "The Congress preferred to negotiate with their (Congress Muslims') rivals and was willing to compromise .... Congress Muslims at best were bargaining counters; when not so, they could easily be stored in the deep freeze. This placed Ansari and his friends in a quandary and damaged their credibility in the eyes of their followers."

The British Government's Communal Award of 1932 extended the pernicious principle of separate electorates (first introduced in the Indian Councils Act of 1909) beyond Muslims and Sikhs to the Depressed Classes. The Award gave Muslims in provinces in which they were a minority a much higher proportion of seats in the legislatures than was warranted by their numbers. Mushirul Hasan writes: "The Act of 1909 was the beginning and the Communal Award the culmination of the Government's strategy of leaning heavily on the Muslims and giving them a distinct political identity which they did not actually possess...Muslims alone had reasons to feel satisfied. It is true that their main demand – statutory majorities in the Punjab and Bengal legislatures – was not conceded, but in both the provinces they retained not only their separate electorates but they were also given more seats than any other community in the provincial assemblies." The Award gave Muslims of Bengal and Punjab "considerable opportunities to win a clear majority for themselves" if they were able to capture some of the seats reserved for special interest groups or secure their support.

On the position taken by the Congress that it neither accepted nor rejected the Award, Mushirul Hasan comments: "It was an extraordinary decision, yet it could hardly be very different. It was the inevitable outcome of the past cultural and feeble policy of the Congress. A strong line adopted at an earlier stage and followed regardless of short-term consequences would have enabled it to resist all forms of communal demands. But it had been unwilling to do so...Ansari's own views on the Communal Award were unmistakably clear, forthright, and consistent with the objectives of the Nationalist Muslim Party.



He characterized the Award as a vicious document based on the principle of divide and rule. Reaffirming, along with Azad and Sherwani, the NMP's position that joint electorates with adult suffrage constituted the only acceptable basis for India's constitution, he asserted that the Award would create fresh communal groups and interests and impede future prospects of Hindu-Muslim cooperation...Given the choice, Ansari would have campaigned against the Award and rallied his band of followers in the NMP, who seemed uncertain and confused, on to his side. But Congress strategy to play it safe clipped his wings. In the end, he performed the role expected of him: to explain and defend Congress policy."

British imperialism had driven Indian nationalists into a corner by conferring on Muslims and other religious minorities, beginning from the first decade of the 20th century, not only separate electorates but weightage in representation in the legislatures or government services or both. The Congress could have chosen to set its face firmly against separatism and taken the stand that V.D. Savarkar, the patriot and revolutionary, took *vis a vis* the Muslims. He told them in effect: 'We shall fight for freedom along with you if you will join us, without you if you do not, and despite you if you stand in the way.' The other course was to win the favour of Muslims by outbidding the British – which was clearly impracticable. The Congress oscillated between rejection of and, more often, acquiescence in separate electorates. This resulted in acute embarrassment for nationalist Muslims. If they stood out for uncompromising opposition to the imperialist-Muslim separatist combine, they could be taunted with inability to influence the Muslim masses. If nationalist Muslims, even at the cost of their own claims, advocated a compromise with the Muslim League in order to forge a joint front for advance towards self-government, they were liable to be suspected as disguised Muslim Leaguers. If, going against the current of opinion, they advocated a settlement with the British authorities in the larger national interest as Maulana Azad and Asaf Ali did (when the entire Congress Working Committee was held in detention at Ahmadnagar Fort during World War II) in view of the imminent Japanese invasion of India and the famine and epidemics that raged in Bengal, colleagues would raise their eyebrows (*Congress President's Isolation*, Chapter VII).

The final act of letting down nationalist Muslims was the acceptance of India's partition on the basis of religion by the Congress leaders, and the Mahatma's acquiescence in it.

Asaf Ali was away from India during the crucial months of 1947 when the British Cabinet Mission's plan, which would have retained India's unity though with a weak Centre, fell through and was replaced by the partition scheme worked out by the last British Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten. The acceptance of this scheme was a cruel blow to nationalist Muslims, notably Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan – popularly known as the 'Frontier Gandhi'. Under the partition scheme, a referendum was to be held in the North-West Frontier Province.

overwhelmingly Muslim, where the Khudai Khidmatgars led by Ghaffar Khan and his brother Dr. Khan Saheb had won the elections held for the provincial assembly the previous year.

Aruna Asaf Ali was staying at that time along with her sister Purnima Banerji at Constitution House (where the UNCTAD Flats now stand) on Curzon Road (now Kasturba Gandhi Marg). The wartime tenements were utilised for accommodating members of the Constituent Assembly. Their nextdoor neighbour was Ghaffar Khan. Aruna Asaf Ali recalls how he bitterly remarked to her: "We have been betrayed."

The story is told in detail by Pyarelal, Gandhiji's secretary for long years: "The tragic outbreak of communal frenzy in pre-partition India took Gandhiji to Noakhali and from there to Bihar. Badshah Khan was with him in Bihar. Together they tried to wipe the tears from the eyes of the victims of communal frenzy, instil courage into their hearts and quicken the conscience of the majority community so that both the communities would be able to live together like brothers as before. While Gandhiji was thus occupied, the Congress leaders accepted the partition plan behind his back. The Muslim League demanded a referendum in the North-West Frontier Province as the price of its acceptance of the partition plan for Punjab and Bengal, and the British and the Congress accepted it over the heads of, and without reference to, the Khan brothers or their Khudai Khidmatgars. Badshah Khan was very upset. 'We fought and won the general election in 1946 on this very issue. Why should we have another opinion poll?' he asked.

"There was another and even weightier reason. The terms of the referendum had been restricted to a choice between India and Pakistan, to the exclusion of an autonomous Pakhtoonistan. Badshah Khan was afraid that in the surcharged atmosphere at that time the issue of India versus Pakistan was sure to be presented by the Muslim League as meaning Hindus versus Muslims and exploited to rouse communal passions. This might result in a revival of blood feuds, from which he had toiled so hard to wean the Pathans. He and his party boycotted the referendum, and the N.W.F.P. was declared to be a part of Pakistan. As Badshah Khan later put it, they were 'thrown to the wolves'."<sup>12</sup>

## **For Radical but Orderly Change**

An early warning against the law-breaking part of Gandhiji's programme of mass action was sounded by Annie Besant (1847-1933). An Englishwoman partly of Irish extraction on her father's side, she made India her home and was among the earliest to demand self-government. It was her interment by the Governor of Madras in 1917 that led Jawaharlal Nehru to take his first step in public life by addressing a protest meeting. He organised a branch of Annie Besant's Home Rule League in Allahabad, and Asaf Ali did so in Delhi. Both soon switched their allegiance to Gandhiji when he became the virtual head of

the Indian National Congress in 1920.

For a brief period, during the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement, Asaf Ali was, as Mushirul Hasan puts it, an 'extremist' compared to M.A. Ansari. But thereafter he remained at heart an adherent of Mrs. Besant's approach of seeking radical change through lawful means. In this respect Asaf Ali differed from both Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Gandhiji's programme was non-violent but, from time to time, he called for disobedience of a law or executive order deemed to be unjust. Often, what was intended to be a non-violent mass struggle resulted in acts of violence. The earliest instance was in April 1919, when a mob in Ahmedabad killed a police officer during the Satyagraha against the repressive Rowlatt legislation. Gandhiji acknowledged his 'Himalayan' miscalculation in expecting that men in the mass could remain saintly in forbearance in the face of State violence. But the realisation did not prevent Gandhiji from organising the non-cooperation movement, which reached its peak early in 1921. He called it off following a gruesome incident that occurred at Chauri Chaura on 4th February 1922: a crowd of demonstrators who had been roughed up by the police set fire to a police station and the men inside were killed as they tried to escape. Hope again triumphed over experience on further occasions, culminating in Gandhiji's call in 1942 for what was to be, but did not remain, a non-violent movement to make the British quit India.

Mrs. Besant lost heavily in terms of popularity when she stood aloof from and criticised Gandhiji's non-cooperation programme. She wrote in *New India* (13th December 1923): "When India has Swaraj, how are her governments to deal with brickbat-throwing mobs? Are they to be allowed to kill and maim as they choose, to fire houses, to burn living men to death? If not, at what stage of brickbat-throwing may bullets make reply? One of my objections to mass disobedience and to plundering mobs is that they are rearing huge obstacles in the way of the first Home Rule government." The warning has proved prophetic.

Gandhiji acquiesced in but did not approve the programme of Council entry which many Congressmen (including Asaf Ali) favoured since the mid-1920's. Jawaharlal Nehru, with his radical views influenced by Marxism, kept chafing against Council entry and office acceptance in the provinces – till he himself joined the Viceroy's Executive Council in 1946. Asaf Ali, in contrast, was consistently a moderate in method (he was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly from 1934), while being radical in aim. The contrast between Jawaharlal Nehru and Asaf Ali was all the more striking because the two were good friends and of somewhat similar appearance. Of the same medium height and build, both wore the nationalist garb that was in vogue among the urban middle class in north India – *achkan* and *churidar pyjama* made of Khadi (handspun and handwoven cotton). Asaf Ali was fastidious to a degree in the matter of dress. Aruna recalls an occasion when her husband sent his *darzi* to Jawaharlal Nehru on the latter, admiring the cut and fit of Asaf Ali's

*achkan*, asked who his tailor was.

But Asaf Ali was behind the fashion of the day – or ahead of it, depending on the predilection of the viewer – in his political and economic philosophy. Jawaharlal Nehru was attracted by the Soviet model of development and looked forward to inaugurating central economic planning in free India. He envisaged the ending not only of British colonial rule but of Indian princes, landlords and capitalists. Gandhiji did not take Jawaharlal Nehru's radicalism altogether seriously, and tended to treat it with amused tolerance. In a letter of 30th April 1936 to Agatha Harrison, Gandhiji says: "Though Jawaharlal is extreme in his presentation of his methods, he is sober in action. So far as I know him, he will not precipitate a (class) conflict." Six years later, speaking in Hindi at the A.I.C.C. meeting in Bombay on 8th August 1942, Gandhiji appealed to the princes to act as trustees of their people's wellbeing: "It is my duty to warn the princes that if they will act while I am still alive, they may come to occupy an honourable place in free India. In Jawaharlal's scheme of free India, no privileges or the privileged classes have a place. He wants planned economy. He wants to reconstruct India according to plan. He likes to fly; I do not. I have kept a place for the princes and the zamindars in the India that I envisage." -

Unlike Gandhiji, the persons whom Jawaharlal Nehru railed against were not amused. B. Shiva Rao, a patriotic publicist and a friend of Asaf Ali, has commented on the negative consequences of Jawaharlal Nehru's pre-1947 radical talk: "Left-wing Congress leaders unwittingly played into the hands of British reactionaries by their radical programme designed to extinguish the rights and privileges of landlords and princely rulers. As a tactical move in self-defence, these elements threw all their resources and active support into the movement for Pakistan, which Jinnah could never have created by himself as a potent force." Asaf Ali likewise deplored Nehru's rash pronouncements (*Random Jottings*, Chapter VII). Asaf Ali welcomed the Birla Plan for the development of India's natural resources through indigenous private enterprise primarily, and cautioned against a doctrinaire approach (*For Economic Pragmatism*, Chapter XI).

Though uncompromising in his insistence on non-violent methods, Gandhiji believed in stirring up and mobilising the masses as much as Lenin did in Russia and Mao Tse-tung in China. But he could not control the chaos like the two revolutionary leaders of the West and of the East: they commanded a tightly organised apparatus of ruthless power, whereas Gandhiji exercised only moral force. Asaf Ali's attitude to Gandhiji was reverential but not uncritical. While Asaf Ali regarded peaceful forms of resistance as appropriate and desirable in the struggle of an unarmed people against a mighty empire, he could not accept non-violence as an absolute principle. An entry of 16th October 1942 in Asaf Ali's prison diary reads: "In the face of insolent might, must we remain still like the unoffending grass and allow every cloven hoof to trample us, or like the bramble prick the trampers in their soft part? There are

those who would maintain that, in spite of all the mowers, grass has not ceased to grow. It yields to the scythe and the spade, but scatters its plentiful seeds to the four winds and invades gardens, fields and even the heights of steeples and spires, and lives on from century to century. The giant lizard and the mammoth are no more, but the grass on which the beasts banqueted is as exuberant as ever. They would maintain, on this analogy, that non-violence is the secret of survival. But is mere survival the aim? I believe in the normal working of human nature. Violence must be met by violence. But it must be the violence of the surgeon's scalpel and not the executioner's instrument. Both the motive and the method must be of the skilled healer, not of the cannibal. Defence may indeed, in specific cases, necessitate the elimination of the very source of mischief."

A pamphlet entitled 'Constructive Non-Cooperation' published by Asaf Ali in 1920 brings out vividly both the radicalism of his social and economic thinking and his preference for defying the entrenched alien authority by ignoring it rather than breaking its laws (*Towards a Self-governing Society*, Chapter V).

Despite Gandhiji's sustained pleading for politically self-governing and, as far as possible, economically self-sufficient, conglomerations of villages organised in Panchayats, there has been since independence a galloping movement towards concentration of industrial and political power in the national and State capitals and other urban centres. Among the many dreams that Jawaharlal Nehru dreamed as Prime Minister but did not realise was Panchayati Raj. The very concept came to be distrusted when a Constitution Amendment was sought to be enacted during the term of the Rajiv Gandhi Government. The Amendment dealing with the subject was resisted because it seemed to many to be a device to bypass State Governments not controlled by the Congress (Indira) and to make Panchayats and urban Municipal Corporations agencies for executing Centrally conceived and Centrally funded socio-economic programmes. Asaf Ali's tract on social self-government belongs to 1920 but continues to be a document of seminal value and relevance as India approaches the 21st century.

It is noteworthy that though Asaf Ali was averse to the turbulence of both Gandhiji's mass movements and Jawaharlal Nehru's wished-for socialist revolution, as between the two he preferred Gandhiji's approach. He writes in a letter of 26th February 1948 from Washington to Aruna about the "two extremes which met in the cycle of the desire for a revolution. But of the two, I always found Gandhiji's way more acceptable and I loyally carried out his political behests. But I maintain that respect for law and order is the most urgent and imperative need of India today. And Gandhiji's civil disobedience, as distinguished from criminal disobedience (his own distinction) never lost sight of this respect for law. This is why he always selected some flagrantly wrong law for civil disobedience. This was never fully grasped by the people generally, and this is why we took 25 years to achieve what according to his conception and vision was to be achieved within a year. I confidently assert that I had a

much nearer approach to his mind than most others. I was the first, in my 'Constructive Non-cooperation', to give a concrete and positive form to his non-violent non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Gandhiji's last Will and Testament is about village self-government."

Also of contemporary relevance is the vision entertained by Asaf Ali of an Indian Commonwealth that would bring sovereign political units into a cooperative relationship even if the sub-continent should get divided (*A Sub-Continental Commonwealth*, Chapter VII). He did not want partition. But if that was the price to be paid for getting rid of British colonial rule, he was prepared for it. Asaf Ali wrote in his Prison Diary on 4th October 1944: "Perhaps not until Hindustan and Pakistan have actually worked as free countries for some time will either Hindus or Muslims and others begin to see things in proper perspective. If so, well, let even a divided India begin to function as a cooperative commonwealth of sovereign states."

It is interesting that Jawaharlal Nehru thought of a confederation of India and Pakistan and Jammu & Kashmir as a possible solution of the Kashmir problem, and authorised Sheikh Abdullah in April 1964 to discuss it with President Ayub Khan of Pakistan. Nothing came of it because of Nehru's death the following month. But the idea of regional cooperation has gained strength since then. There is the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, of which India and Pakistan are members. Among other instances of a trend world wide towards regional cooperation are, in the West, the emergence of the European Community and, following the break-up of the U.S.S.R., of the Commonwealth of Independent States; and, in the East, of the Association of South East Asian States and the move for the formation of an economic grouping of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

### **Marriage of Equals: The Challenge**

As Aruna Asaf Ali has remarked, the apparent stability of arranged marriages in India has rested on the wife having been trained in most cases to subordinate, if not obliterate, her individuality: "Personality clashes are thus minimised, and marriages endure on an unjust basis and in the suffocating atmosphere of male dominance....The apparent failure rate in what are called 'love marriages' is high only because both the parties have their own developed personalities, and no mansion is so large that two egos inhabiting it will not bump into and bruise each other."<sup>13</sup>

Freely chosen marriages are entered into when two persons are attracted to each other for reasons which usually include shared interests and a common outlook on life. But it may well happen, over a period of time, that the dominant interest of one of the parties changes, and that his or her values to live by get transformed. This can raise a wall between the two and make the marriage a failure – whether or not there is formal divorce. The last decade of the married



life of the Asaf Alis marked the failure of their marriage, and is a case study in a problem of great contemporary interest: the immensity of the challenge inherent in a partnership of equals.

The marriage began with high promise. Young Aruna and the considerably older Asaf were each prepared to face the censure of the orthodox among members of the respective families, and of the religious communities in which they happened to have been born (*Marriage That Caused a Stir*, Chapter VI). Educated in Christian missionary schools, and fascinated by English literature, Aruna felt grateful to Asaf for, as she puts it, making an Indian of her. It was through him that she first learnt something about the rich literary and cultural heritage of the country. He inducted her also into national political consciousness. One who had been brought up for years on 'God Save the King' came to understand the significance of 'Bande Mataram' and of Iqbal's 'Hindustan Hamara'. Soon, as Aruna read and reflected on the works of writers like Virginia Woolfe and Bernard Shaw, and began to follow with interest the speeches and writings of Jawaharlal Nehru, she came to form her own ideas and to discuss them with her husband. Asaf Ali says in a Prison Diary entry of 13th February 1943: "For fifteen years we have lived together, until lately I her mentor and she my apt though not uncritical follower...In later years we began to develop by critical contacts and mental repercussions on each other. And she became quite as much my preceptor as I was hers." (*Aruna and the Underground*, Chapter VIII).

It is not as if these harmonious years were problem-free. Music includes counterpoint. Disharmony results only when the tension can no longer be held together in a creative relationship of stimulus and consonant response. The relationship between Aruna and Asaf in the years till the Quit India movement was so strongly rooted in mutual understanding and accommodation that it was able to withstand formidable problems. Aruna's marital home, where Asaf's mother and grandmother had brought him up from infancy, was in Kucha Chelan, a crowded Muslim locality in the walled city. Sanitary arrangements in the old house were primitive, and the surroundings were unwholesome. Aruna had been used to better living conditions. When she was not in a boarding school at Lahore she lived with her parents at Naini Tal, a summer resort for Englishmen and well-to-do Indians. Her father, who had learnt catering and hoteliering in America and England, established there a hotel run on modern lines, known as Hotel Hindusthan. Asaf Ali himself had spent several years in London and in Europe, and chose to live in Kucha Chelan only out of respect for his mother's sentimental attachment to the place. He describes in his autobiographical notes the acute discomfort he felt on a visit home from Europe in 1912 (*A Delhi Interlude*, Chapter III) at the lack of privacy and of modern amenities. His mother, accustomed to the old ways and with relatives and neighbours around who were like members of an extended family, would have felt like a fish out of water if he had moved her out to one of the bungalows

with lawns that were coming up in the Civil Lines outside the city wall to the north, or in New Delhi to the south.

More distressing to Aruna than the lack of modern amenities was the stifling social atmosphere. She had no idea earlier of the seclusion of women in Muslim homes, not having had occasion to visit any. Sensing her bewilderment and unease, Asaf Ali offered to rent a modern house in New Delhi where the two of them could set up a separate home. But knowing how deeply the mother and son were attached to each other – he was her only child, and Asaf Ali virtually worshipped his mother – Aruna could not bring herself to part them.

If she thus showed understanding and forbearance, Asaf Ali was equally generous in respecting her resolve that there should be no children. Their marriage had caused a violent enough storm, and she feared that a child born to them was unlikely to be fully accepted either by one community or the other. Though Hindu identity sat lightly on Aruna, who had been brought up in a Brahmo home free of orthodox customs, she was disconcerted by the prospect of her children being given Muslim names and being brought up, specially if there was a girl child, in the way of life she saw around her.

Asaf Ali would have liked to have a child but was prepared, in the circumstances, to sacrifice this desire. But how was he to explain the situation to his old mother? Like every Indian mother-in-law she was looking forward to the arrival of the first grandchild. Though she would have much preferred to have had a young Muslim woman come into her home as daughter-in-law, she had overcome the initial shock and was treating Aruna kindly and with affection. She agreed, too, that there was no question of Aruna observing the Muslim norms of women's seclusion. But she would have found it shocking and incomprehensible that a couple should deliberately avoid having children. Half a century was to pass before contraception came to be talked about in public in the context of population control. In the 1920's and till much later – and it is indeed so to this day in rural India and among the urban poor – a woman was deemed to be sterile if she did not conceive soon after marriage, and was looked down upon for the terrible defect. Asaf Ali, with surpassing gallantry, told his mother that there was nothing the matter with Aruna and hinted that he himself was perhaps a case of male sterility.

How could two persons of such rare sensibility and mutual understanding drift apart and almost become strangers to each other? Partly it was because it was no longer possible for Aruna to return to the domesticity associated with married life after her experiences during the Quit India struggle. She emerged from it as a political leader in her own right. She was no longer referred to as the wife of a member of the Congress Working Committee; on the other hand, Asaf Ali began to be described as the husband of Aruna. She had become a legend when she emerged from underground life in January 1946, though she was less than 37 years old.

Another reason was that she was attracted by the socialist ideas of many of her comrades-in-arms during the struggle, and after 1946 moved steadily closer to the Marxist and pro-Soviet position of the Indian Communists. This made her disdainful of the offices in the bourgeois establishment occupied by her husband as Cabinet Minister in the Interim Government, ambassador, or Governor. With a political mission of her own to pursue, she could not possibly play the role of a dignitary's wife. She would only visit her husband from time to time. The loneliness of Asaf Ali's last years did as much as the hardening of his arteries to bring about his death at the age of 65. Aruna Asaf Ali was to write later, while discussing Jawaharlal Nehru's neglect of his wife Kamala: "This is the dilemma of those for whom public work becomes an obsession. I faced it from 1942 onwards. Placing public causes above human relationships and duties, I kept travelling round the country even after my emergence from underground life early in 1946. I would explain my absences jocularly to my husband by remarking – after the title of one of Lenin's works – 'You are the State, I am the Revolution.' But after Asaf's passing away came punishment in the form of pangs of regret and self-reproach at my neglect of him."<sup>14</sup>

The social climate has changed greatly, at any rate among the middle and upper classes, and Hindu-Muslim marriages are much more common now than sixty years ago. But the case of the Asaf Alis continues to be a vivid example of the great challenge and strain that a marriage of equals entails, specially if one or both are not content to follow the tempting course of career advancement for enhanced material well-being but throw themselves into larger causes. Is individual self-development compatible with the year-round and dusk-to-dawn togetherness assumed to be natural and necessary in the married state? Every individual, man or woman, feels the need sometimes for privacy and to be let alone, and at other times for intimate companionship and support. How, if it is at all possible, are the two needs to be reconciled? There seems to be no greater challenge in the sphere of personal life than to improvise, from situation to situation, ways of keeping alive a friendly partnership of two individuals on the basis of equality.

Aruna Asaf Ali doubtless had in mind her own life experience as well as the chequered marital fortunes of the many friends and acquaintances she has watched over the years when, after an appreciative survey of the reform of family laws effected in India since the 1950's, she says: "There are problems of human relationship which it is beyond the power of laws to solve. No law can bring about that mutual respect, tolerance and forbearance which are vital for the success of the man-woman relationship in marriage. Individuals must cope with the problems of human relationship on the strength of their own perceptions and ethical values."<sup>15</sup> The responsible exercise of an individual's autonomy is as demanding as defiance of restrictions. Freedom has its burdens no less than subjection.

### **Man's Brief Eternity: Smiling through Tears**

Beyond the relevance of Asaf Ali's life and work to several social and political problems that India continues to face, his writings are likely to be of enduring interest because of the poetic sensibility which they reflect.

Men of action soon pass into books of history, which record a succession of events in linear time. Poets, on the other hand, seem to jump out of time and to bear witness to eternity. They speak of peak experiences, in which puny man touches the infinite.

Asaf Ali was not a systematic thinker, and his reflections are therefore in the nature of intimations and hunches. For instance he believes, metaphorically speaking, in the power of prayer. He writes in the course of his *Random Jottings* at Ahmadnagar (of which Aruna Asaf Ali was not aware till they were discovered and drawn on in the course of my work on this biography): "If telepathic communication is possible, there is no reason why my penetrative thoughts should not travel all round the globe...and seek out Rene<sup>16</sup> and be silently picked up by her. If not at once, some time. In a universe of eternal causation...it is not only possible but highly probable that prayer should evoke a response." As I read out these lines, they sounded poignant to Aruna. -

Her presence by the side of Asaf at Berne, in Switzerland, as he breathed his last on the night of 2nd April 1953 might strike some – as it does this writer – as strongly suggestive of a kindly Providence at work. On her first visit eleven months after Asaf Ali became India's envoy to Switzerland, she had reached Zurich by air from London only that morning. Receiving her at the airport Asaf Ali talked, as they drove to Berne, of the arrangements he had made for them to travel by car to certain parts of Europe which she had not visited till then. At the end of the day the two had a quiet dinner by themselves. As they were climbing the stairs to go up to the bedrooms, Asaf began to breathe heavily. Aruna said she would telephone for the doctor. But he made light of it, putting down the discomfort to indigestion. She went to his bedside when it was evident that he was in severe pain, and very soon it was all over. The wheel of Asaf Ali's life turned full circle, with the woman he loved standing by his side and holding his hand.

Asaf Ali also believed, again metaphorically speaking, in the immortality of man's spirit though the body decays and dies. A favourite image is of the bubble of individual consciousness which rises from and subsides into the ocean of universal Being. And another, of the dew drop that catches and reflects for a while the full glory of the sun. He writes: "Inebriated with the kiss of life, we question and challenge the Creator in a myriad ways of nescience till we are kissed out of existence by the onrushing current of Time. But are we completely sponged off? Is anything completely wiped out? No...The past is in the seed-plant-flower-fruit, and the future is in the same seed-plant-flower-fruit spiral.

Nothing is outside the whole, which always is, and the *is* includes the past and the future." Though Asaf Ali often writes gloomily of Pain and Time that keep sending mortals into the insatiable maw of death, the intimations of immortality enabled him to smile through the tears. Aruna recalls that he did indeed smile in his last moments.

Asaf Ali's place among Urdu poets must be left to the judgement of competent critics. And he made no claims to being a philosopher. But the poetic sensibility reflected in his meditations, both in Urdu and in English, is indubitable. He knew what it is to feel eternity in the instant moment, and infinity within oneself.

## NOTES

1. *An Advanced History of India* (p. 484) by R.C. Majumdar and others, Macmillan, 1950.
2. *Sufis, Mystics and Yogis of India*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962.
3. *Sources of Indian Tradition* comp. by Theodore de Bary and others, Motilal Banarsidas, 1963.
4. K.R. Qanungo, quoted in *An Advanced History of India* (p.481).
5. *Pandit Vishnu Digambar* by V.R. Athawle, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1967.
6. *Science, Socialism and Humanism* by Aruna Asaf Ali, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1990.
7. 'The Rashtrapati' in *Modern Review*, Calcutta, November 1937.
8. In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru included in *A Bunch of Old Letters* (p. 212), Oxford University Press, 1990.
9. Clause (1) of Article 28, in the Chapter of the Constitution setting out the Fundamental Rights of citizens, reads: "No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds." Clause (3) envisages religious instruction being imparted in other educational institutions. It reads: "No person attending any educational institution recognised by the State or receiving aid out of State funds shall be required to take part in any religious instruction that may be imparted in such institution or to attend any religious worship that may be conducted in such institution or any premises attached thereto unless such person or, if such person is a minor, his guardian has given his consent thereto." Article 30 guarantees to religious and linguistic minorities "the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice." It goes on to say that "The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language."
10. Carved out as a Muslim-majority district in Kerala, in 1969 when a Communist-led coalition government, which included the Muslim League, was in power.
11. Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari (1880-1936), leading nationalist. Eminent physician and surgeon of Delhi, he presided over the Madras Congress session in 1927.

12. *In Gandhiji's Mirror* (p. 154) by Pyarelal and Sushila Nayar, Oxford University Press, 1991.
13. *Private Face of a Public Person: A Study of Jawaharlal Nehru* (pp. 15-16) by Aruna Asaf Ali, Radiant Publishers, 1989.
14. *ibid.* (p. 20).
15. Preface to *The Resurgence of Indian Women* (p.xv) by Aruna Asaf Ali, Radiant Publishers, 1991.
16. Pronounced 'Reenee', this is the pet name by which Aruna was known from her childhood.

## 2. From 'Bismillah' to St. Stephen's

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That Akbari Begum should have been at her parental home in Delhi for her third confinement was something of a departure from social custom. It is only for the first confinement that, ordinarily, the expectant mother leaves her marital home.

The circumstances are recalled by Asaf Ali in an autobiographical fragment in Urdu, written in June 1917, under the title *Zubaida Sultana's Naumasa*.<sup>1</sup> 'Naumasa' is a ceremony performed when the ninth month of confinement begins. 'Zubaida Sultana' is a disguise for Akbari Begum, Asaf Ali's mother. Similarly, Mustahsan Ali Khan stands for his father Ahsan Ali who was a police officer posted at the time (1888) in Rawalpindi. Husband and wife had been living apart, though he would visit her at Delhi from time to time.

The first child was still-born and the second was a girl who died after two days...The real name of Zubaida's mother was Zaki Begum but her late mother had fondly started calling her Banni (literally, bride), and therefore in her parental home everybody called her Banni Begum.

Zubaida Sultana came from inside the house to the forecourt where Banni Begum was talking with Khala Amma (Zubaida's aunt). Zubaida was hardly 20 or 21, slim but well-rounded body, fair complexion, delicate features, long hair, light but costly ornaments (exquisitely crafted and jewelled ear-rings, tiger-headed bracelets on the wrists, golden anklets on the feet), light-coloured *dupatta* and *kameez*, and *salwar* with eleven gathers. Fortitude, seriousness and sensitivity evident on her face, but a touch of disappointment, even grief, behind the thin veil of her smile. There was a grace in her movements such as is rarely found in young women of her age. In India, girls even at about 21 tend to lose the bloom of youth and to acquire the jaded look of maturer women.

Zubaida was the first child of Banni Begum, and since there was no child in the neighbouring households she became everyone's favourite. She has continued to elicit the same affection, elaborate functions being organised on any occasion, big or small, as if it was a marriage. And it was not as if

she did not possess endearing qualities; she had them in ample measure. When she went to her in-laws' place, there too she was liked by all. It seems like light years now since her marriage. As long as the father-in-law Lulf Ali Khan and the husband's elder brother Mohsin Ali Khan were alive, they showered all affection on her. In the beginning her husband too was very fond of Zubaida, and she lacked nothing. But during the last three or four years, Mustahsan has developed undesirable tastes. Ever since he was posted as tehsildar at Ambala at the young age of 24, his attention began to wander.

In just the second year of her marriage, Zubaida heard whispers about a certain Noorjahan who used to teach in a school. One Malool Saheb, a Commissioner, came to inspect the school. After seeing Noorjahan he became so infatuated that he abandoned not only the commissionership but the religion of his forefathers – he was a Christian – and married her. But she turned out to be a wanton. She played such games of hide-and-seek that the less said the better; and she met Mustahsan Ali in the course of these games. Some more tales of her husband's waywardness reached Zubaida's ears but she did not believe the stories, or Mustahsan Ali persuaded her to disbelieve them. Then came a Memsahab – probably an Anglo-Indian – into his life. One day Zubaida learnt from the *dhobin* (washerwoman) that the Mem's clothes had been given for washing from his house. Some people even said that she had become a Muslim, married Mustahsan and started living with him, observing purdah. With this, Zubaida's entire world collapsed.

Mustahsan would not have dared to misbehave like this if his father and elder brother had been alive. He tried to get Zubaida back but she insisted that she would not return to his house till it was rid of the witch.

When Zubaida came and sat near Banni Begum and her sister, and heard Naumasa being mentioned, painful memories of her two earlier deliveries rose in her mind. "Khala Amma," she said, "do you know what I had to undergo when there was that still-born child?" Here, out of shyness, she cast her eyes down. "Hakim Ashraf Ali, may God bless him, made me undergo a rigorous fast for eleven days. That left me barely alive...Then, the following year, there was the second arrival and departure." Here, again, Zubaida became self-conscious and avoided looking at the older ladies. "Khala Jan, even now when I think of the baby – what big eyes she had – breathing her last, I begin to shudder."

Asaf Ali continues the narration of his mother's unhappy life in the autobiographical notes written by him in English in 1944, while in detention at Ahmadnagar Fort during the freedom struggle.

My father during his last visit, or rather the visit which proved his last, repented of his wantonness, and solemnly promised to terminate it by giving the Anglo-Indian *conge* on his return. When, therefore, my mother



received a telegram from Rawalpindi, soon after my father's return there, she was overjoyed to think, while the telegram was being deciphered by her minor brother Mujtaba Khan (telegrams used to be badly scrawled in those days), that now at last she had triumphed, and her home was purged of the desecrating presence. The telegram, however, revealed that Ahsan Ali was down with double pneumonia, and she should take the first train if she cared to see him alive. (I was just 18 months old then, and my earliest memory of anything goes back to being taken into a strange room – the railway compartment – on that journey.) My mother found him alive and still in a state to talk a little, and particularly tender and affectionate to her and to me. But the third day she was back home in Delhi with his body. She was just 22 when she became a widow, and lived on for 52 years to mourn her loss and to dote on me.

Two years before my father's death towards the close of 1889, his elder brother Mohsin Ali had died as the result of a fall from his horse at Simla. Mohsin Ali, like my father, was an officer in the police force, and was in charge of the central police station at Simla. By the time I was three years old, every male member of my father's family and of my mother's was dead except my father's step-brother (who was far away somewhere) and my mother's minor brother. The only important link on the paternal side was with my grandmother who was living on what was left of the ancestral zamindari estate near Nagina in the Bulandshahar district of the United Provinces. Of Kashmiri extraction, she came of a Hindu family that had converted to Islam.

Asaf Ali concludes his account of the many deaths that crowded the years immediately preceding and following his birth with philosophical reflections – such as lace much of his writing, including personal letters – on Pain, Death and Time:

Why am I narrating all this? I am battling with Time, and writing the biography of Pain. May be it will find no court, no jury, no verdict. But I shall leave evidence on record, even if it is poorly marshalled.

Time erases all marks of Pain in a manner so thorough that across the cycle of ages we see nothing but the silent stars serenely hung in eternal calm. What goes on in these heavenly bodies none here on this planet can say for certain. Chaos roars and rages in the nebulae, which look like garlands of soothing light hung, as it were, on the green branches of the trees in your garden for the celebration of your favourite's birthday. Yes, Time counts births only, births attended by laughter and festivity. It has no use for the Pain which attends each birth, and attends life all through to the sea-shore of Death where existence sets sail for the port of nothingness. And yet who can say? Death is perhaps the threshold of yet another realm, on another plane of existence, a universe within the universe, even as our thought, invisible and unbodied, springs out of the equally invisible

domain of our consciousness and overspreads the remotest nooks of existence, like air or water seeping into inaccessible pores. Who knows whether the end of life on this earth is really the end of everything for us? Whether it is or it is not, the gloomy empire of Pain knows no end. Men come and men go, but Pain remains with its wide jaws all open to swallow the ceaseless stream of its victims.

About the circumstances of his birth on 11th May 1888, Asaf Ali writes:

I am the third in a series. The eldest was a boy still-born, who nearly carried with him his and my mother. The second, I was told, was a beautiful girl who breathed her last very soon after her birth. The outcome of my mother's third confinement was therefore awaited with mixed feelings. Spiritual aid was summoned, and for months before my birth the leading Pirji (spiritual preceptor and also healer) of Delhi had armed the household with the most potent weapons in his armoury against the evil spirits and influences which Pain employs in its nefarious pastime on earth. My mother had to wear talismans, burn *fatilas* (magical words or numbers written on pieces of paper and folded lengthwise into slender pipe-lighters), drink water breathed on by the holy man, and so on. And I was to wear talismans written on gold, silver and jade tablets until I was 12 (and I did wear them until I was nine) and to be (and was) fumigated with the smoke of the *fatilas*.

I was born a poorly child, about 6 or 7 lbs. All the paraphernalia of spiritual warfare against Pain's phalanx of evil spirits was overpowered on the sixth day of my arrival. While fumigating me – my mother was saying her *maghrib* (dusk) prayer – my grandmother happened to drop a big piece of live charcoal on my stomach. I was told that I shrieked and drew up my right leg, covering the charcoal between my tummy and the leg. It nearly finished me off. It took the allopathic doctors some six or seven weeks to cure the extensive burn.

## A Matriarchal Home

Though Asaf Ali grew up in a matriarchal environment, with his mother and maternal grandmother as the formative influences, his upbringing was not effeminate. Akbari Begum's strength of character was evident in her refusal to countenance her husband's bigamy, even though Islamic law permits a man to have four wives at a time. She had a mind, and values, of her own.

Akbari Begum decided, on her husband's death, to bring up her infant son herself. Aruna Asaf Ali recalls asking her husband whether his mother did not consider marrying again, since widow remarriage was not taboo among Muslims as it was, at that time, among Hindus. Asaf Ali said that his mother did not want to entrust her son to the uncertain care of a step-father. Akbari Begum learnt some English herself from a Baptist woman missionary, and showed her

judgement in sending Asaf to school for modern education instead of traditional religious instruction in a *madarsa*. This showed her awareness of the need to move with the times.

Asaf Ali's autobiographical notes include recollections of childhood experiences both pleasant and painful:

I was three-and-a-half years when one day my mother, having undressed me for my bath, happened to get busy with something else. I walked out to the main entrance of the house in Adam's garb, and saw on the road a distant cousin, a boy of six or seven. He was on his way to see his father who was the officer in charge of a police station two to three furlongs from our house. I went along with him. But I was promptly sent home, riding on a constable's shoulder. My mother stood ready with a baby swish off the henna tree from our little garden, for a hot reception. I did not feel that I had done anything wrong. Apart from being the pet of the whole house, I had been told by even Miss Smith (the Baptist missionary who used to come twice a week to teach my mother English) that I was a good boy. My mother's angry look therefore surprised me, and I attempted to laugh it off. But I received two sharp strokes on the tender part of my back and burst into tears – and so did my mother. That was the only time she punished me. Did it set up a complex, I wonder, the fig-leaf complex of Adam, the shame of the naked body?

Among the pleasant childhood memories recorded by Asaf Ali are the animal fables and other stories he used to hear narrated by his grandmother. She had a gift for story telling and had a large store of fairy tales, conundrums, nursery rhymes and games. They were a source of entertainment, Asaf Ali says, not only to children but to the grown-ups:

A story that we never tired of hearing is of the jackal that outwitted a tiger. The wily but idle jackal was once taken to task by his wife for loafing about and leaving her and the young ones in a poky den without enough substance to feed on. The jackal told her that he would go out to look for suitable living quarters and food, and asked her to be patient for a while. "Thank heaven, I have found them", he said on return. "Let us move to the new place with our dear whelps." And so the jackal's family moved to the vacant lair, where they found abundant food for the hungry mouths and everything else for their comfort.

However, the wife became greatly alarmed when the jackal said that it was the den of a tiger. "Now is the time", the jackal told her, "for you to keep your head cool and use your wits. I am going to post myself at the entrance. The moment I see anyone coming, I shall wave my tail, and you should pinch the little ones hard to make them cry. I shall then thunder out, "Why are the children crying?" And you should roar back, "For tiger's meat." I shall growl again, "And what about the tiger killed yesterday?" And you should say, "It is gone stale."

The tiger's scout, the monkey, came along to make sure that the palace of the king of the jungle was ready for the royal return. The jackal did as he had planned, and the monkey went flying back with the news of the usurpation of the palace by unheard of beasts that were blood-thirsty for a tiger. On hearing this the great cat was very wroth and made quickly for his lair. As he approached, the whelps were made to cry again, and the jackal yelled out: "Why are the children crying?" The tiger stopped dead on hearing the terrifying reply, "For tiger's meat", and sprang back into the jungle.

Thus the wily jackal beat the king of the jungle by his keen wits, and found a fine home for his nagging wife and puling brats.

Asaf Ali recalls that there were also fairy tales, often with a moral, about mighty kings in resplendent palaces, fakirs with magical powers, charming princesses and gallant princes:

Not one of them was without the love motif, delicately woven into the texture for an audience of children. Of these my favourite was a story in which the prince-lover is turned into a song-bird, and the princess-beloved into a flowering plant the scent of whose blossoms pervaded the great ocean.

Some of these tales may be traced by researchers to the ancient land of the Nile or Persia or Arabia, and others to the inexhaustible storehouse of ancient India. In essence they are eastern.

The normal formula before the narration was: "The facts of the tale are hearsay, and not witnessed with the eyes. May the truth and falsehood rest on the neck of the original author. Your king and mine is God, by whom the Prophet was made king." And the tale would be concluded with the benediction: "May the Almighty bless all, the story-teller and the hearers, and restore their better days, as He restored those of the people in the story."

Each tale lent itself to elaboration with infinite details, and its filling out depended on the patience of the listeners no less than on the capacity of the narrator. In the case of my grandmother the capacity was unbounded. She would weave out the *kahanis* (stories) with the skill of an artist and the imagination of a poet. We learnt in time the titles of the more popular and frequently told tales. When there was a difference of choice among the audience, I being the youngest used to decide – usually in favour of my own favourite story, or my favourite playmate's choice.

My mother had her own store of *kahanis* but her treasures were soon exhausted because she had not the patience to respond to the children's enthusiastic encores. Grannie was different. She could go on and on to humour us, till we fell asleep.

## Redolent with History

Asaf Ali recalls that it was not always for stories that the children would pester grandmother as they gathered round her in summer nights under the star-be-spangled sky, or indoors in the long, snug evenings of winter:

We loved to hear her reminiscences of court life in the last days of the Mughals. Zaki Begum and her older cousin sisters were born and brought up in the Lal Qila (red palace-fort) of Delhi which was the court of the last Mughal emperor. They used to divide life into two periods: *shahr baste* (the settled or inhabited city) and *shahr ujre bad* (the city after the uprooting). The first period was up to the *ghadar*, the great uprising of 1857 which the British called the Sepoy Mutiny. It ended in the dethronement and exile of Emperor Bahadur Shah. The second period followed the storming of Delhi and the massacre of its population, specially the Muslims, and the destruction of nearly a third of the city by the victorious English. The old ladies never spoke of those days, when hundreds of families fled Delhi, without bitter tears.

My maternal grandmother, the daughter of a refugee family that had been connected as courtiers with the vanished royalty, was barely nine years of age when her widowed mother brought her back to the ruined and depopulated city of Shahjahanabad. Her eldest brother had disappeared after the sack of the ill-starred city and for long was believed to have been killed during the fighting. He returned full 50 years after, and told us of the suffering and the adventures he had been through.

The young girl of nine was married to my grandfather Irtiza Khan, and a new chapter of life was begun in the house where I was born.

Irtiza Khan was a poet and calligraphist, and a musician who performed with skill on the sitar. Irtiza's brother Murtaza Khan joined the cavalry in the armed force raised by the British East India Company, and rose to the rank of a Risaldar.

Irtiza Khan represented the intellectual and artistic, as his elder brother Murtaza the martial, traditions of a well-known Pathan family of Jagirdars in Bulandshahar. From some eighty villages, the family inheritance dwindled steadily on account of the blind generosity and extravagance of my great-grandfather, Sardar Abdullah Khan. Proud to the point of folly, he would not allow himself to be surpassed by his compeers in entertainment. And blind to the consequences of yielding to the parasitical ring of sycophants around him, he indulged in grand tournaments of cock, partridge and quail fights, the degenerate pastimes of the time, and emptied his treasury.

The *haveli* (large house) that Irtiza Khan acquired in Delhi was in Kucha Chelan, in the Daryaganj locality of the walled city, not far from the Red Fort and Jama Masjid. There are different accounts of how the *kucha* (street) got its name. According to one version, living there were the *chelan* (disciples) of a

Pir. Another tradition has it that the original name of the street was Kucha Chahalan Amiran, referring to forty eminent persons who lived there. Yet another explanation is that *chelan* refers to the admiring disciples of the poets and other notables who used to assemble there for *chahal* (a stroll) enlivened by learned conversation. Asaf Ali lived in the Kucha Chelan house for more than 57 years till he moved in 1945 to a house in Windsor Place, New Delhi, that was allotted to him as a member of the Central Legislative Assembly. Asaf Ali's mother had died in 1942, and he had been under detention since August of that year till his release in 1945 along with other Congress leaders and the opening of political talks by the British authorities for transfer of power. Asaf Ali recalls:

'The whole of my life was spent in the house of my maternal grandfather, from the day of my birth up to the day I shifted to New Delhi. The house was built during the reign of emperor Akbar Shah as an Imambara (a Shia building for the annual Muharram congregations to renew the memory of the tragedy of Karbala) for Nazir Imam Baksh, a dignitary of the Mughal court. It was confiscated by the British after the Mutiny and was acquired by my grandfather at a public auction in 1858.

According to reports current when our family moved into it, no less than two hundred persons of the locality, who had taken shelter in the house during the general massacre in Delhi, were put to the sword in the spacious halls and courtyard of this house. Their ghosts, if any, did not bother the new owners, but their memory haunted the place every time the word *ghadar* was mentioned. Delhi had known only one earlier massacre of comparable brutality, ordered by Nadir Shah in 1739.

Popularly known as 'Barrister Asaf Ali's haveli', the house was bought by the Delhi municipality some years after Asaf Ali moved to New Delhi. In the nineteen-seventies the building was condemned as unfit for habitation, and the rooms on the first floor were demolished. The structure is now largely roofless. What remains of it is like the wide trunk of a big tree that has been felled, with nothing left of its spreading branches and crown. It houses a primary school for girls run by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

Asad Ali, a nephew of Asaf Ali's, recalls how he and other children would play on the terrace of the house, under the shade of a giant *neem* (margosa) tree – now no more – which towered from the courtyard. There also used to be a small artificial pool in the courtyard, in which the children loved to splash about in the summer.

Asaf Ali's earliest teacher was his mother, of whom he writes:

She was the eldest child of the family, and received all the attention which would have ordinarily been the share of a son. Her education was undertaken by her father who added calligraphy to her accomplishments. She was singularly bright, and had a refined taste for things aesthetic. Her religious instruction was deep, if not extensive, and affected her outlook

on life to her dying day. Her temperament was at once sensitively grave and soberly cheerful. She loved the good things of life, and was an acknowledged authority on questions of social behaviour, traditional ceremonies and customs, and on Urdu idiom. Hers was the language of the qila – the King's Urdu – which she had acquired from her mother and her mother's cousins. She was just thirteen when she was married to my father, a lad of 17 or 18.

Both grandmother and mother had a keen ear for music, and knew a great deal about it. They had sweet voices, and I owe to them the beginning of my appreciation of Indian music, and of rhythm in voice and verse.

My mother and my aunt were voracious readers of books, and quite frequently one of them would read aloud. Neighbours often joined the inmates of the house to hear Akbari Begum or her sisters read out Urdu works or translations in Urdu from Arabic or Persian. I, for one, never missed these readings. Thus, between the ages of four and eight, I made my first acquaintance with the Urdu version of numerous Arabic and Persian classics.

I was barely four when my mother began to talk of engaging a tutor for me. Her own teacher, Miss Smith of the Baptist Mission, had already taught me to pronounce the English alphabet; and it was time to put me into the harness of some kind of discipline. Hafiz Nawab Mirza undertook my instruction in the Qoran, and Pandit Bishamoor Nath, who taught my maternal uncle, was engaged to teach me English.

When I was four-and-a-half, the ceremony of Bismillah ('I begin with the name of God'), which was combined with *ghori* (riding a horse in something resembling a wedding procession, after recovery from circumcision) was celebrated with pomp and show. It was one of the most exciting events of my early life and in our social circle. All the ceremonies associated with a proper wedding were gone through. I was dressed as a bridegroom in gorgeous clothes, wearing the *jama* (dress worn by kings) and had to go through the ceremony of 'seeing the face of the bride' and playing with her with flowers and fruits. By mere chance I crashed into the room where a very beautiful, grown-up neighbour, Aesha, was being decked out as the prospective bride. I rejected her outright, and insisted on having none else but my paternal aunt as my 'bride' for the occasion. The only daughter of my Nagina grandmother, she lived in Kucha Chelan, close to our house. Aesha was a beauty in a thousand, and my aunt though handsome was nothing like Aesha. But I somehow felt that it was indecent to be linked even in play with an unrelated stranger. My mother was annoyed at first, because it was a slight to Aesha, but my wish prevailed. And that spirit of independent choice proved my mother's despair in after years, for I rejected all her proposals of a wife for me. This mock marriage according to the old custom was the only wedding celebration of mine after my

mother's orthodox heart that she was to see and enjoy, for when I did marry at 40, it was anything but orthodox.

Leading men of the city were invited to witness my Bismillah in the evening. Nawab Sharfuddin Ahmad Khan, the eldest and the most notable of them all, a neighbour and a close friend of my grandfather, performed the ceremony. Pen, Inkpot, and Tablet of silver were produced, and liquid saffron was used for ink. Sitting against a heavy *gao-takya* (bolster) on a *masnad* (gold-embroidered carpet), the old Nawab – whose big white beard fringed his always laughing face – asked me to keep the silver tablet over my knee. Dipping the pen in the saffron, he gave it to me and, holding the pen above my tiny hand, guided it to scrawl something in a very unstraight line. He asked me to say after him, *iqra bism-i-rabbikal lazi khalaq* ('Read in the name of God the Creator of all...') and then everyone present cupped their hands and prayed aloud that I should have good luck. This was followed by a liberal distribution of sweetmeats, and the *ghori* procession to the Jama Masjid, where my mother placed a silver lamp on the pulpit. And the grandest day of my life ended with my eyes closed in sound sleep on the back of the horse which carried me home.

About the time of my Bismillah, one day I sat listening to my mother reading the Qayamat-Nama, the book which describes Doomsday and the torments of hell – worse than in Dante's Inferno. At first I was fascinated, and then so frightened by the horrors of hell that before the reading was over I was in the grip of high fever. I do not know whether one can be frightened into a fever, but it is a fact that I was. And my mother felt very guilty about it.

For the next four years or so I was to struggle with Urdu, English, and the Qoran – of which my mother wanted me to learn some of the well-known chapters by heart, which I did. During these years I was not in the best of health, but they were crowded with absorbing experiences. Every day brought new words and phrases, new birds and animals, new plants and flowers, new clothes, new kinds of eatables, new toys, new relationships. A constant stream of these went on flowing into my consciousness: the reeds with their waving plumes, and the water fowl and other birds shot by my uncle who was fond of shikar, revealed something new, like fresh windows on the world.

I had a variety of pets – pigeons, song birds, white rabbits, guinea pigs and a monkey. I loved dogs, and once brought home from my aunt's house a sweet little terrier called Gypsy. But the dear thing just rushed back to Molu, the sweeper who used to look after it. And like a distracted lover I ran after the dog until I stopped at a huge ditch (dug in the middle of the road, for laying the water main), which could be crossed by a temporary, very narrow plank bridge admitting one-way traffic in single file. Gypsy scampered across in no time, but I could not match the dog's swiftness. I



was about to go on to the bridge on all fours – the ditch seemed frighteningly deep – when my maternal uncle overtook me and fetched me back. I remember the tears of my mother and the funereal look over every face in the house. My uncle both deplored and praised my daring, but my mother and the other ladies would have none of it. How many memories crowd upon one of such adventures, delightful experiences and unsolved riddles – all packed close in the space of just those four or five years from the day you begin to be aware of your surroundings and can mouth words with some definite relation to your physical and mental experiences.

One day a cousin of my mother came to see us, and he upbraided my mother for not putting me to school. I was eight. He thought (rightly, as I could see later) that the system of private tuition on which she was relying was both expensive and of little use. No geography so far, and I had been taught hardly any mathematics. So my mother agreed to send me to school. The next day my uncle took me to the Model School, about two furlongs from our house. The headmaster examined and passed me for the second standard, and told my uncle that if I came again after acquiring some more arithmetic I should be fit for the fourth standard. But my uncle, who had no faith in private tuition, was keen to see me in the school. So I lost two years' advantage straight off, which I much regretted at the time.

After a week or ten days of baffling novelties like geography, drill and gymnastics, I reached the top of the class within a month. And from then, for the four years I was at the Model School, I was monitor of my class. This institution was an adjunct of the local teachers' training school (the Normal School). The senior trainees used to take classes in all but English, under the supervision of the regular teachers. By the time I had reached the 5th (final primary) class, I was considered fit to take the lower classes in all subjects. My teachers hoped that I would get the district scholarship, but I missed it by a few marks which I lost in arithmetic.

There were a couple of incidents during my years at the Model School which I remember vividly. They illustrate the reactions of a young mind to strange happenings. One day we got a half-holiday for no obvious reason. The next morning some of the older boys of the final class began to talk about it. They said (and it was true) that one of the pupil teachers, one Azam Khan, a kindly and good-natured fellow, had committed suicide by drowning himself in the school well. On recovering his body they found on his person a letter addressed to a certain Balmokand (not of our school) with whom he was in love, and who had disappointed him. It seemed to me a revolting episode, but it was even more shocking to find among some of the older boys an admiration for this disgusting 'romance'. I was to learn later that such perversions were not uncommon in schools and colleges – no, not even in Oxford and Cambridge.

## Leading a Protest at School

The other incident occurred after the arrival of a Christian teacher of English when I had reached the final class. This gentleman brought with him a peculiarly Anglo-Indianish atmosphere and had the habit of abusing the boys in foul language. 'Swine' was a frequent term in his vocabulary. He used to employ expressions calculated to wound the religious susceptibilities of the boys. For instance a certain Muslim boy was Mohammad's *sala* (brother-in-law) – a particularly vulgar abuse.

The boys looked up to me, as head of the class, to do something. I asked them if they were prepared to defy this man. Everyone agreed. It was also agreed that when the teacher next dared abuse anyone, the abuse should be returned – but in logical terms. He was as much a human being as any of us, and if anyone was called a swine, the term applied to the teacher too. Childish, but that was our argument.

How was the defiance to be staged? Everyone should prepare his lesson for the next day as well as he could, but none should answer a single question right – and should take the consequences. This rebellion was sure to be reported to the headmaster, and that would be the opportunity for us to expose the English teacher's revolting ways. As usual I was the first to be asked to answer the teacher's question. According to the rules observed for encouraging the competitive spirit, if one student failed, the boy answering the question correctly would take the other's place and the one who had tripped would have to move down. I had never been reduced to yielding the first place. But a boy disgraced himself that day by betraying our pact of defiance, and quickly displaced me. I shall never forget the anger I felt, and the rest of the class felt, at this treachery. His shameful triumph over me was, everyone knew, bound to be short-lived, but it was galling. However, the rest of the class stood solid in defiance. The teacher soon discovered that it was an organised revolt. He singled out for abuse a Hindu and a Muslim boy, who were his pet victims. One was Tara Chand, since dead, and the other was Abdur Rauf of whom I have not known anything since leaving school. Be it said to the glory of the spirit of both of them that they replied back firmly and returned the abuse in the logical form decided upon: "I am as much a human being as you, and therefore the term 'swine' applies to you no less." First one and then the other, they bravely stood out the most savage caning I have ever witnessed, until the teacher was exhausted and out of breath. He left the class and fetched the headmaster, Bakhtawar Singh. We congratulated ourselves on the success of our plan, for this was just what we wanted.

The class was turned out for inquisition, and lined up outside the classroom. The headmaster came with cane in hand, and rather angry. But justice demanded a proper inquiry and an explanation of our conduct. The full truth came out, and although the headmaster did not show any sign of

relaxation at the time and appeared to take a serious view of our hurling the abuse back at the teacher, and even went the length of further punishing the two heroes of the day, we soon learnt to our satisfaction and joy that the English teacher received a strong admonition. He never misbehaved afterwards. The lesson we taught the erring teacher had a salutary effect all round. As for the backslider, he made amends by supporting the general complaint.

I have the happiest memories of this period of my life. What I learnt from the age of eight to eleven at this primary school and outside it, at home, was the foundation on which all else was built. They taught much in those days through object lessons – using pictures, models and other aids of absorbing interest – of the rudiments of physical geography, botany, zoology, chemistry and physics. At home I was learning other things including music, and versification in Urdu: I was versifying at 9 or 10, unaided except by reading poetry, particularly my maternal grandfather's manuscript anthologies of *Diwan* and *Masnavi*, and *Dagh*, my mother's favourite, and some other poets. I had a natural ear for music, and learnt from the ladies of the house about the theory of Rag and Ragini. I also started playing *pachisi* (a game of chance with pawns of different colours) and *shatranj* (chess). But I was forbidden to touch cards, regarded as a vulgar pastime, just as I had been told not to play marbles or fly kites. However, I could watch kite flying by others. I was taught the elements of wrestling and indigenous physical exercises. I also became a good shot with the air-rifle.

Military affairs interested me greatly. The frontier rising of 1894-98 had led on to the Malakand and Chitral campaigns. My uncle used to get illustrated English periodicals from an employee of the white man's club. He and his friends used to come together on evenings in his *diwankhana* (the private club of our old society), and I often used to get round them for news and pictures. I heard quite a lot in those days at this club room about the Amir of Afghanistan (Abdur Rahman), his prowess as a soldier and statesman, his one million Pathan soldiers always under arms and ready for action, and much about the great Caliph, the Sultan (Abdul Hamid) of Rum (Byzantium) in Turkey and the gallantry of the Turks, and, in connection with the frontier campaigns, about Generals Lockhart and Roberts.

Meanwhile other things were attracting my attention. A Lametta Mill – where model machines of wood were made for the foundry – was started in our neighbourhood. Between the ages of nine and ten I was a frequent visitor to this workshop, and took so keen an interest in the work of the carpenters and smiths that occasionally I was allowed by them to amuse myself with jobs like using the plane or boring holes with the gimlet. And I got the *kharadi* (the turner) to make toys for me--yo-yos, and the diablo.

I owed this to the friendly attitude towards me of the European engineer's Kashmiri wife, who knew my paternal grandmother, also a Kashmiri. A German converted to Islam, the engineer was an old man who used to drink hard on the quiet.

One day when I was six or seven, a very handsome European-looking lady arrived at our house with two children, younger than me, a boy and a girl. I was asked by my mother, in a most genuinely agreeable way, to call the lady 'Mamma' and to regard 'Sonny' as my younger brother. I had heard, in a vague fashion, that my father had gone through a sort of marriage with an English or Eurasian woman. When I was told this by my mother – I was perhaps four at the time – I expressed my keen desire to see my father. (I did not know that he had died.) I was told that he was in a far-away place. "But let me go there, mother", I said, "and I will fetch him. He can't resist coming home when he sees me." The flood of tears this let loose all round rather bewildered me. And now the foreign lady, called Agnes, had turned up.

She treated me and the others with such sincere affection that we were all pleased with her. After a time she left the children with my mother (only one of them, the boy, was my half-brother) and went away and married an Anglo-Indian of the famous Skinner family, a railway station master. My mother's whole attitude was nobly generous towards Agnes and Asghar, the boy. She saw in him the very image of my father, and was not a little sorry when Agnes took the children away after six months or so, for my mother had grown fond of Asghar and treated him in every way like me. The poor boy died when he was barely 15, of pneumonia, while he was living with his stepfather and mother. Sonny's death was a great shock to my mother, and I must confess to me, for I had begun to feel an elder brother's affection for him. We were on the best of friendly terms with 'Mamma' till her death in 1926.

When I was about 11 years of age, I was suddenly made conscious of a spectre overshadowing our house, the grim spectre of poverty. My maternal uncle Mujtaba Khan, the only male member (a youth of 20 or so), was the sole and immediate hope of my mother's family. But he had adopted the attitude and ways of a 'new nabob', as the Urdu idiom has it, after my maternal grandfather's death. He gave up his studies even before taking the school final examination. This ruled out the prospect of becoming a Deputy Collector or Deputy Superintendent of Police – which was the ambition of most educated young men those days. Instead, my uncle collected a gang of unworthy friends who egged him on to the amiable task of quickly running through his patrimony – not huge by any means, but enough to last a lifetime if wisely managed. And by the time I was about nine, he was stony-broke. The elder of my aunts was due to be married and had to be provided with a dowry; therefore my mother's

reserves had to be drawn on. Two years after this, when I was completing my primary school course, my uncle was still looking for a job worthy of the scion of a distinguished family. Further, my paternal grandmother who owned a village near Nagina with a respectable income (which I was eventually to inherit from her) ceased to be helpful and contented herself with a few trifling presents to me at intervals. As I learnt later, she had been persuaded by her daughter – my only paternal aunt – that I was too young for direct monetary help and my mother was spending her reserves on her own impoverished family. The result was a period of the worst straits for us.

I became aware of it first when my daily allowance for buying refreshments in school fell into arrears. And one day when I came home ever so hungry from school, and rushed up to my favourite younger aunt for my early evening meal, I was taken aback to find that no fire had been lit in the kitchen. My mother, her eyes swimming in unshed tears and with a catch in her voice, explained with an elaborate effort that everyone in the house was observing a fast. But if I would wait, a cousin who had been sent to bring some milk and buns for me would soon be back. I could guess the truth of the matter: they were fasting of necessity.

Every valuable thing in the house which could be spared – jewellery, big copper vessels, chandeliers, and even the gold and silver trimmings of the ladies' ceremonial suits of clothes – all had gradually disappeared into the pawn shop. No relief was in sight for two most lean years. It was a period of painful anxiety for my mother, who had brought me up in an atmosphere if not exactly of opulence, of genteel poverty. My uncle negotiated loans on the remnant property consisting of three small houses besides the *haveli* in which we lived. This could not go far. It was evident that help from my paternal grandmother was required for my education. But my mother's sense of self-respect would not let her ask for it.

The tension came to a dramatic end when I passed the final primary class and had to wait for a couple of months before joining the middle school. My grandmother invited my mother to take me to her country home in the village of Bhagwanpore near Nagina for a long holiday.

### Excursion to Family Estate

The trip to Nagina was a most exhilarating experience. My paternal aunt, her husband who was a hospital assistant in the army, my mother and myself undertook the journey in high spirits. It involved eight to ten hours by train, with a change and a couple of hours' wait at Saharanpore. I was determined to keep awake to see all the rivers, the Ganges included, and the great canals which had to be crossed. The bridges, the landscape with a distant view of hills, the wayside stations, towns and villages were to me

the revelation of a new world. No conqueror could have felt happier than I did by acquiring the knowledge of so vast a domain, so far only seen on a map.

At last we arrived at Nagina railway station. The station master had known my father, and appeared glad to see me. And then a procession of three or four bullock carts, attended by the servants sent by my grandmother, started off for our village. On the way we passed fields and orchards, and I longed to walk and pick plums and carrots and green gram. But this was 'not done' by a zamindar boy. I was content enough with what the men brought of these for me.

Then we had to cross a big river (Ram Ganga, called *kho* in those parts). It was fordable and the dry parts of its bed were full of a vast variety of beautiful pebbles. It was my first experience of crossing a river, and I was thrilled. The pebbles drew me like a powerful magnet, and I wouldn't let the cavalcade move until a goodly collection had been made. The pebbles were of such variegated colours that it was a wrench to have to pass on. The fine silvery sand of the river bed in a variety of ribbed patterns, and thin sinewy streams at irregular intervals, with cat's-tails, sedges and reeds on the far bank presented a powerfully attractive scene, and the inner strings of my soul began to yield their silent music to every wind that came sporting. The reeds were valuable to me, for I had been buying them for Urdu writing. Here the best could be had by the ton merely for the trouble, or rather the pleasure, of collection. So, all the way, the servants smiled at my peremptory commands and sportily collected these valuables. When we finally gained the opposite bank of the river, our estate agent said: "Now this is our boundary. We are on our own land." My proprietary instinct responded proudly in silence. The few hundred acres stretched out in front appeared to me a veritable realm, and my childish fancy converted the wayside ponds into lakes, and the copses into forests. But thanks to the 'object lessons' at school, my eye was trained to minute observation, too, and I acquired a good deal of information about the wild herbs and plants which grew in the boundary spaces between fields and along the rutty village road.

At last we reached the village itself, some 40 or 50 houses, or rather mud huts, standing cheek by jowl on a prominence which rose in a gentle slope from what must have been the old river-bed. It occupied a picturesque situation, with two copses (my forests) on either side, overlooking the great meandering river. I was overwhelmed with joy at the situation of the village, with its wealth of huge *semal* (silk-cotton) trees, sturdy *shisham*, mango and banana groves. The 'manor house' was brick-built, but a small affair as compared with my mother's house in Delhi. It was a rustic building and on the whole comfortable enough, with a granary and store-

house attached. The outer compound was bounded by byres for bullocks, cows and buffaloes. There were no horses, for my uncle had died young of a fall from a horse. Anyway I could not ride a horse.

The whole village seemed to me to be a big family, whose members had various jobs assigned to them and received their wages in kind. The ploughman, the weaver, the goatherd, the smith-carpenter, the potter, the *banya* (moneylender), the washerman, and the gypsy and the beggar by caste, were all members of this family. And they seemed to have a close-knitted system of cooperation and barter among themselves. The zamindar was their overlord. I found them good-natured and cheerful.

It was the sugar-cane season and the *kollho* (bullock-driven cane-press) was working. I was struck by this sugar factory, and gradually turned my hand to every process – despite protests, for it was below the dignity of Sarkar (literally ruler, the landlord): even I, a slip of a boy of eleven was Sarkar in this village. I dug cane, pruned it for the press, fed the press, and helped to drive the bullocks; and then stoked the fire, and helped in every process from juice-boiling to the making of *gur* (dark-brown country sugar). It was capital fun. Short of ploughing, too difficult for a child, there was nothing in a farmer's work at which I did not assist. It was during this holiday that I learnt my first lessons in the economy of village life, and learnt to love the peasants and their vocation. (Of all the losses I have suffered in the course of my career, and they are not a few, I have never ceased to regret the necessity of selling out this village.)

I heard the famous folk epic 'Ala Udhal' sung here, for the first time, and saw the itinerant jugglers and gymnasts perform amazing feats. (In those days there was no radio and no cinema, yet village life was very rich all round.) Fresh butter, cream and milk were available in plenty. But apparently the village was without vegetables, though the villagers were mostly vegetarian. We had to send for vegetables, condiments, fine rice, white sugar and meat from the nearby town of Nagina.

Every fortnight or so I was taken to the town, where lived some well-to-do cousins of my paternal grandfather. I met them for the first time. Nagina is famous for ebony work, the tree being plentiful in the neighbourhood. I ordered *qalamdan* (pen-caskets), and pens of ebony with my initials in ivory.

Altogether I had three holidays in the ancestral village. During these visits I learnt the rudiments of practical field mensuration, and gained a broad idea of the system of producing and marketing life's primary requirements – foodgrains, cotton, sugar, timber, fuel, animal products, pottery and homespun – and of social relationships in the rural setting. I was initiated in the art of benign zamindari, and of gracious behaviour towards the cultivating ryots. But I could sense an under-current of dissatisfaction among some of the tenants with the *karinda*, our agent. How my

grandmother believed that he was content with his ridiculously low visible pay, and was not feathering his nest in devious ways, passes my comprehension. When I succeeded to the property I learnt that he had built himself a little fortune and had become a landlord in his own right elsewhere, possessing land not much less than what he was managing for us.

In this account of the earliest inpourings of the various tributaries of the stream of consciousness, I should not leave out the first vague and guilty surmises about the mysterious sources of life. Till about the age of eight, I imagine, I knew no more than that there was something so indecent about certain parts of the human anatomy that they were never to be mentioned. On one occasion, a distantly related boy who was some two or three years older whispered to me that children were born as a result of sexual union. I was indignant and retorted: "You may have been born that way, not I." I thought he was attributing shameful acts to my parents. This attitude of disgust, shame and sin lasted a long time. But there came to me the knowledge of a curious and pleasant sensation in an accidental way, at the time of my first visit to the village. A girl of about my age, who used to assist the maid servants in the house, offered to massage me one evening when I lay tired in my bed after a busy day. This sort of massaging is not uncommon. It was winter, and I lay well covered with a quilt. She sat on her haunches on the edge of the bed and pressed my legs, under the quilt. As her hands travelled up, there arose in me a strange wave of agreeable sensation. She then placed my foot between her legs and nursed it. This happening remained incomprehensible to me till, long afterwards in life, I awoke to the characteristics of sex. If the present sketch of my experiences and the growth of my consciousness in the early years were robbed of this memory, it would present a picture clearly incomplete and untrue.

My first visit to the village rounded off one chapter of life, the earliest and the most rich in experiences, and one for which I sigh now, when the evening of life is advancing towards me. Even in the midst of poverty, life was at that time a journey towards the bright, sunlit summit of hope, and virgin curiosity was in a constant dance of delight at gaining new knowledge. At times it involved hard and unpleasant labour, when tutors and teachers insisted on memorising of the unintelligible, and spellings, and arithmetic, the least intelligible of all. But every segment of this stage of life had its rewards – and what rewards: to top the class was a prouder achievement than conquering a country.

The time came, on return from my holiday, to leave the Model School and join the middle school. Financial help from my paternal grandmother was now assured, but I felt anxious on account of the possibility of having to occupy something less than the first place in a new school. How vain is man – even a little man!



The Anglo-Arabic High School<sup>2</sup> near Ajmere Gate which I joined was run on lines wholly different from those of the Model School. There was next to no provision for developing practical observation, but plenty of theory and cramming and the terror of corporal punishment. The new subjects for me at the middle school stage were Arabic, history and higher arithmetic. There was also theology, and midday prayers. Arabic proved a little too much on account of the old method of learning classical grammar. Arabic could be dropped for science but there was none in the school to teach it, and no laboratory. History was wrongly taught, for it was a matter of cramming dates and names. I was the ninth student to be registered, and in the absence of monthly competitive tests, stayed put in that position. However, I received an unexpected stimulus to academic achievement towards the close of my third year in the middle school. Among those who came to Delhi to witness the Durbar held in January 1903 in honour of King Edward VII's coronation was Najmul Huda, Barrister-at-law, and his young brother-in-law Jamal who was of my age. They stayed with us. Apparently noticing in me something a little out of the ordinary, Najmul Huda encouraged me to aim at entering the Indian Civil Service. I felt flattered, and it became my dream for a career.

For two generations most of my relations had been in the police service. But I had conceived for it a strong dislike, which might have sprung from a childhood incident. I was barely six when my father's old servant Mirza took me one day to the bungalow, not far from our house, of one Williams, a Superintendent of Police who had been a colleague and friend of my father's. As the Saheb came back from his ride and alighted from his horse at the gate, Mirza saluted him, and presented me as Ahsan Ali Khan's son. Williams glanced at me, uttered a grunt and passed by, without so much as "Oh, so you are Ahsan's little son." I hated the man for his superior air and began to dislike the very sight of police uniforms.

My mother had told me that my father was thinking of a lawyer's career for me. It seemed a good enough aim. But the day I was told about the I.C.S. as the highest career one could aspire to, I took it for granted that I was destined to enter it. And in my childish way I wrote 'future Deputy Commissioner of Simla' after my name on some of my books.

Soon after the Durbar, when I was about fifteen, I was suddenly seized by calf-love. A cousin of my mother's came to Delhi with her daughter and stayed with us. I had seen this girl some years ago as a kid. We were of the same age. And now she had blossomed into a perfect flower, but my eyes saw nothing in it until one day we sat round grandmother for a *kahani*. The two of us sat next to each other and by an accident she leaned towards me, touching me for a moment. What there was in that touch it is difficult to say, but it awoke in me a desire which grew stronger day by day. It was a perfectly innocent affair of the heart, and we never exchanged two words.

to express how each felt. But I took my aunt into my confidence. She told my mother. Once or twice my mother, who had already sensed it, hinted in a seemingly casual manner that my cousin was really a foster sister. And when my aunt put it to my mother in so many words, she was shocked and said angrily: "But they are foster brother and sister. Do you expect me to sanction incest?" The romance was rudely knocked on the head, but I could not understand how a drop of milk shared between two persons could raise an eternal barrier.

During the third year of middle school I got to know Rauf Ali, who became a close friend as we progressed through the high school classes. He was to be my *alter ego* lifelong. A year older than me (on account of illness he had missed being my senior in school), he brought into my ken a maturer mind. He had been influenced by a much older cousin of his (whom I had occasion to meet afterwards), who was a rationalist and a fine artist. Till I came to know Rauf I had accepted or rejected views according to the bias of my elders and teachers, repeating incomprehensibles and borrowing opinions without suspecting their questionability. The school system pushed the critical faculty into the background, and encouraged one to echo others' ideas. Rauf brought into our conversation views which were unorthodox, and helped me to look at things from a fresh angle.

My reading outside the textbooks was no longer confined to romantic novels in Urdu and English, but included inexpensive publications of the Rationalist Press Association of which I became a member by correspondence. I and my group of friends – Rauf, my cousin Qasim (Dr. Q.A. Mansuri, afterwards Dean of the Faculty of Science in the Muslim University of Aligarh), and one or two others – retailed among ourselves the opinions, on natural history and sociology, of Darwin<sup>3</sup>, Huxley<sup>4</sup> and Haeckel<sup>5</sup>, and of Mill<sup>6</sup>, Spencer<sup>7</sup> and Lang<sup>8</sup>.

As for my studies, a few weeks of intensive work was all that I found necessary for passing the examinations with fair distinction. I neglected Arabic and mathematics. It was later that my deeper interest in science and astronomy, philosophy and history developed, and then the neglected subjects mocked me to my lasting chagrin. While at school, I was lulled into complacency by the impression I made on my class-fellows. When I sat for the matriculation examination, I took a bet that I would bring 'doldrums' and 'protoplasm' – these were topics which were being widely discussed at the time – into my answers. It was easy enough to work doldrums into the paper on physical geography. But protoplasm was far out of our scope. When I came to the last paper, on history, and still failed to find any opportunity for thrusting it in, I saddled Lord Roberts, the British general on whom we were required to write a note, with the hobby of participating in the scientific controversies raging round protoplasm. Rather puerile and irrelevant, and Heaven alone knows how the examiner

took this aberration attributed to Lord Roberts. But I knew that I was through, and a little bit of fun would not bar my way to success.

### **Incipient Interest in Politics**

It was the partition of Bengal in 1905 that first stimulated young Asaf Ali's interest in public affairs. The Muslim empire in India had expanded eastward and incorporated Bengal by the end of the 12th century. The governors of Bengal often owed only nominal allegiance to the rulers at far-away Delhi – the Sultans and subsequently the Mughals. Some of Bengal's kings like Nusrat Shah patronised local culture and promoted Bengali literature. There were, as a result, two currents of popular feeling in Bengal. One was of a common Bengali identity. The other was Hindu resentment against the Muslim conquest: many had abandoned their ancestral faith on finding it profitable to embrace the religion of the rulers, or difficult and risky not to do so. There was also a tendency among Muslims to regard themselves as the ruling class.

After the battle of Plassey in 1757, the East India Company won the right to govern Bengal in the name of the Mughal emperor who had been reduced to a figurehead. India came directly under the British Crown and parliament following the suppression of the uprising of 1857. In contrast to the leaders of the Muslim community who tended to withdraw sullenly into the shell of orthodoxy, several among the Hindu elite were receptive to modern education and to the new ideas of rationalism and democracy, science and technology.

Unlike self-employed craftsmen or daily wage earners, the educated middle class both among Hindus and Muslims looked mainly to employment in the public services for a living. Modern education through English having been introduced first in Calcutta, capital of the East India Company's Raj, Bengali Hindus were to the fore in the administrative services. It is also the educated middle class that throws up political leadership. The Bengali intelligentsia, largely Hindu, were therefore also prominent in the national awakening marked by the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Bengal's partition in 1905 was designed by the British Viceroy, Curzon, to win Muslim gratitude and loyalty by providing for Muslims in Bengal's eastern districts a new province in which they would be dominant. The decision set off a movement of protest in Bengal. The anti-partition agitation was supported by radical nationalists like Balgangadhar Tilak<sup>9</sup> of Maharashtra and Lala Lajpatrai<sup>10</sup> of Punjab. The rallying cry of demonstrators against the partition of Bengal was 'Bande Mataram' (Hail to the Motherland').

In a reference to Bengal's history and to the anti-partition movement, Asaf Ali was to write later: "Bengal's history beyond the certainties of the Muslim period trails off into the mist of hoary ages, and you may imagine anything from the glories of the earlier Aryan, Buddhist and Hindu ascendancies to Chinese influences and infiltrations through the north-east frontiers. Between the

twelfth and the seventeenth centuries Bengal was thoroughly soaked with Muslim influence and culture, and a large part of its population became Muslim. With the advent of the British, the Hindus of Bengal quickly adapted themselves to the new aggressors and began to sail under their wings. By the fourth decade of the nineteenth century Calcutta became a thriving centre of British power, even though the last of the Mughals and the last of the Nawab Vizirs of Oudh were still holding court in Delhi and Lucknow. Bengal produced great scholars of English as well as of Arabic and Persian, like Raja Rammohun Roy whose profoundly liberal outlook brought into existence a new faith, or rather the old faith purified, in the form of the Brahmo Samaj. Modern education in English remained the corner-stone of the Samaj. And this in spite of the political cry of Swadeshi and Swaraj which began to be preached since the fateful years 1905-6 which saw a whirlwind agitation for annulment of the hated partition of Bengal. When I say hated, I mean hated by Hindu politicians of Bengal."

Asaf Ali describes in the autobiographical notes how he came to know of the anti-partition agitation in Bengal and the impact which it made on him (he had just entered his 17th year):

I was in the final class of the Anglo-Arabic High School when a fellow student, on return from a visit to Calcutta to attend his brother's wedding, waxed eloquent over what he had seen in that city. He talked as if he was describing another country and another race of men. "You can have no idea", he said, "of the sense of community among Bengalis. If one of them shouts *bandarimatam* (this, meaning the monkey's wail, was his mispronunciation of *Bande Mataram*), thousands of bareheaded and barefooted Bengalis will come together in a few moments."

We did not read newspapers in those days, there being no local paper and the *Pioneer* of Allahabad forbiddingly costly at four annas<sup>11</sup> per copy. So Rauf and I decided that we must get at least a weekly. Rauf scraped together Rs. 5 and subscribed to a Calcutta journal. It made a big hole in his pocket, but the subscription was for a whole year. And now we got ahead of our schoolmates in respect of information. We came to know of the indignant rejoinders to Lord Curzon, who had committed the crude indiscretion of attacking the standard of veracity among Indians.

It was at this time that Bishop Lefroy of Lahore<sup>12</sup>, an enlightened and lovable person among the elder missionaries (he spoke Urdu with exceptional accuracy and fluency), visited St. Stephen's College in connection with some function. We of the Anglo-Arabic School, too, went to hear him speak. At the end of the function, which was attended by old boys of the College and some leading citizens of Delhi, His Reverend Lordship strayed a bit and made an attempt to defend Lord Curzon's remark. The Principal of the College requested Dr. Nazir Ahmad, author and orator and one of the outstanding lieutenants of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, to propose the vote of thanks. I still remember the incisive sarcasm of his

speech and the great impression it made. Nazir Ahmad began by drawing a comparison between the distinctive features of the life and customs of the rulers and the ruled. Those of the former, he said, were held to be superior - only by the rulers, who arrogated to themselves the right to judge. Then in a humorous vein he compared Hookee with Cheroote, *garrarya* (baggy Indian pyjamas) with loose European trousers, and the unvarnished western diplomacy with the poor frightened coolie's confusion. Finally he delivered a thunderbolt of a double entendre: "Yes, if we are liars, you are the king of liars." (It was spoken in Urdu, and the actual expression was *jhute hain ham, to ap hain jhuton ke badshah.*) The roof of the hall reverberated with prolonged applause.

On another occasion, at about the same time, Munshi Zakauallah, another stalwart of Sir Syed's group and a historian and mathematician of repute, came to our school of which he was a trustee. He gave a talk in the course of which the topic of cultural and political decay figured. He had seen the last days of indigenous rule, the uprising of 1857 and the sanguinary destruction which accompanied its suppression. He held that the rock of misfortune must reach the bottom before it can be removed. The force with which it was descending could not be counteracted while the rock was still in the air, except with very great strength which was not available. Effective as the figure of speech was, it breathed despair. But that was the outlook of the veterans of 1857. I remember now my maternal grandmother, who had witnessed the devastation of that year, used to tremble at the very mention of anti-government agitation when I embarked on a campaign of mass meetings in 1916, about a decade later.

Thus, step by step, the meaning of alien rule was slowly sinking into our minds. How this incipient political consciousness could be reconciled with the role of a prospective candidate for the Indian Civil Service was a riddle which, at that time of immature mental development, it did not even occur to me to think about.

It was also in 1905, the year of Bengal's partition, that Rauf and I first met Syed Haider Riza. He was the tutor of Mohammed Taqi, one of our schoolmates who like ourselves was attracted by rationalism and philosophy. Haider Riza had the reputation of a thinker and public speaker. Adopting the way of the peripatetics, he would walk all the way from his home to a spot on the Rajghat overlooking the Jamuna river, accompanied by his admirers. There he would roll out resonant and rich periods. Rauf, Taqi and I joined the ranks of his regular listeners and soon became friendly with him.

An opportunity arose for the display of Haider Riza's talents on a wider stage when the Ratepayers' Association of Delhi decided to hold public meetings and register their protest against some municipal tax. Soon, his speeches at these meetings brought him fame as a radical and an orator.

Already the beginnings of political ferment in Delhi had thrown up a small group of lawyers headed by Shankar Nath, Barrister-at-law, and assisted by Kishan Dayal, pleader, who was a brother of Har Dayal<sup>13</sup>. Haider Riza soon came to dominate this group. Thus, within a short space of time, he moved from municipal affairs into larger politics, which meant Congress and the Bengal agitation.

I remember Rauf and I accompanying Haider Riza when he met Keir Hardie<sup>14</sup>, the British socialist, when he came to Delhi during his tour of India in 1907. We found a strange-looking, thick-set Englishman of medium height with somewhat rebellious hair and a black silken sash in place of a belt round his girth. We were impressed by this meeting as further evidence of Haider Riza's revolutionary sympathies.

### **C.F. Andrews as Teacher**

After passing the matriculation examination Asaf Ali was able to proceed to college, thanks to the financial help being received from his paternal grandmother. He had set his heart on St. Stephen's College which had a distinguished band of teachers, outstanding among whom was Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940).

As a young man Andrews was attracted by and threw himself into the work of the Cambridge branch of the Christian Social Union which held the view that Christianity should mean "a hallowing of the social and industrial as well as the individual life of men." Coming to India in 1904 to teach at St. Stephen's College which had been established by the Cambridge Mission to Delhi, Andrews soon became a friend and fellow-worker of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. It was while serving the Indian settlers in Fiji that Andrews came to be called Deenabandhu ('Friend of the Poor'). He described Jesus as the "prince of Satyagrahis", and was himself hailed – after the initial letters of his name – as Christ's Faithful Apostle.

As the biographers<sup>15</sup> of C.F. Andrews put it, he 'bullied' the college authorities into appointing an Indian – Susil Kumar Rudra – for the first time, in 1907, as principal of St. Stephen's. In this effort Andrews was aided by another British lecturer, the Rev. F.J. Western who later became Bishop of Tinnevelly. Of Principal Rudra, Andrews said in a letter to Gandhiji in 1937: "He cherished all that was good in Hinduism, and yet he was a profound Christian." Typical of the sturdy independence and liberalism that then prevailed at St. Stephen's is the fact that the college ignored a government order in 1907, known as the Risley Circular after the name of the official who issued it, prohibiting discussion of political questions. When, in November 1907, Lord Minto vetoed the Canal Colonies Bill of Punjab in protest against which Lala Lajpatrai had launched a movement, the college premises were illuminated to

celebrate the event. Gandhiji, on his visits to Delhi, often stayed with Principal Rudra.

St. Stephen's, like its distinguished peer the Hindu College, was located initially in Kashmere Gate. On 27th March 1939 C.F. Andrews laid the foundation of the present buildings of St. Stephen's, the first of the Delhi colleges to move to the new university site further north, on the other side of the Ridge.

Asaf Ali writes in his unfinished autobiography about the circumstances of his joining St. Stephen's and the years he spent there:

Every time I passed the gates of St. Stephen's College in Kashmere Gate I yearned to pass inside them as an alumnus. They seemed to me to be the portal for understanding the mystery of the universe and of life. I wanted to jump over the years and begin my voyage upon the charted and uncharted seas of knowledge.

The longed-for day dawned when I held the key to this gate. But my friend Rauf was being persuaded to join the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh. We were promised stipends by the local trustees of that college. After much discussion, the two of us decided to go to Aligarh and see the institution for ourselves. As luck would have it, our first contact with some of the alumni of Aligarh, who were our hosts for the solitary day we passed there, left so distasteful an impression on our young—and, I may add, unsullied – minds that we caught the first train back to Delhi. The place seemed to reek of levity and vulgarity. Quite possibly the seniors who happened to be our first acquaintances were exceptions. But the encounter was sufficient warning for us. We gladly reverted to Delhi and joined St. Stephen's College, my dreamland of higher knowledge.

St. Stephen's had a truly distinguished staff in those days including Principal Rudra, Charles Andrews, Maulvi Shahjahan who taught Persian, and F.J. Western. I selected a rather odd group for study, combining science and philosophy with English and Persian. Persian was a necessity because, having given up mathematics, I had to offer a 'second language'. How strange was the idea of Indian universities in those days – and it still persists – that one's mother tongue is of no account: English was to be regarded as one's first language; and yet English was more foreign to an Indian than Persian, Arabic or Sanskrit.

Luckily I had a partiality for English. Though I detested grammar, I entertained the notion that my pronunciation left nothing to be desired. One day I came into conflict with Principal Rudra when I had the hardihood to stick to my own pronunciation of the word 'hero' as against his. This irritated the Principal, who said wryly: "Boys come here to teach, and not to learn." I still think I was not wrong, but I was definitely refractory and rude. (Afterwards I made ample amends, and relations of genuine respect and affection lasted between us till his last day.) I have had to make considerable efforts to correct this trait of my character. I can be calm and

persuasive now, but in earlier life I was prone to sudden outbursts, and I can't say I am entirely cured. How it has marred the tone of some of my speeches in the Central Legislative Assembly, and occasionally my relationship with lower courts, should be a warning to those who allow their temper to get the better of them.

At this time I took pride in airing views – fragmentarily acquired and ill-digested – bordering on atheism. We used to write essays for Charles Andrews, and it was rare good fortune to earn his good opinion. I scored high enough marks from other teachers, but in the beginning Andrews rated me pretty low. I have a suspicion that he wanted to administer a penalty for my pretensions. His remarks cut me to the quick: "Mere padding", "You are carried away by words", and "bad Johnsonian English".

Andrews was a deeply religious person, and undoubtedly one of the sincerest and noblest Christians within my knowledge. He nearly lost his temper when I said in one of my essays: 'Mosques, churches and temples have outlived their utility; they should be converted into places of modern utility such as factories, godowns and laboratories' – or words to that effect. He filled the margin with refutation of my assertions.

On the other hand, my philosophy teacher was an active aider and abettor of heresies such as mine. When taking us through Knight's *Principles of Theism* he smiled his sarcastic smile and said: "No book is better suited to the study of atheism, for after exploding all the classical arguments in favour of theism with irresistible logic, he falls back on a 'moment of illumination' for belief in the existence of God." This was scarcely an aid to theistic persuasion. Also, strangely enough, our syllabus included *Seekers after God* which carried biographical sketches of, among others, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. None would maintain that they were theists.

Realising the trend of unbelief among many of the callow and impressionable youth in his flock, Andrews one day lectured us on the nobility of agnosticism, provided it was the result of a profound search after truth. This was possible only among earnest thinkers who possessed deep knowledge, and who after a most thorough search found themselves unable to assert, or to deny, with certainty. The universe and its reality were so vast that the most learned of scientists confessed their ignorance of all but an insignificant fraction of their content. The finite was incapable of conceiving the infinite, and therefore an attitude of denial – atheism – was preposterous and the result of vain ignorance. Andrews had no hesitation in confessing that if he ceased to believe in the existence of God, the divine reality behind this universe, he would cease to find anything worth living for. Faith was, therefore, as essential to his life as the air which he breathed. It was an inspiring address – not a sermon, nor a learned



disquisition, but an appeal to one's heart and soul. And a more eloquent or a more effective speaker I have never yet come across. From that day I gave up atheistic assertions as hollow, and a strain of earnest search entered my mind.

Once, Andrews condemned the maxim 'Honesty is the best policy' as a vile statement. He maintained that 'Virtue is its own reward' is the motive power of noble conduct. He was brilliantly impressive.<sup>16</sup>

On another occasion he spoke, at the top of his form, about the course of progress. His metaphor has had an abiding influence over my thought. He saw in the rhythm and swing of historical events the likeness of the incoming sea, each wave rising and travelling further than its predecessor, and reluctantly falling back into the trough of the sea. Successive waves carry progress a level higher, and recede leaving an ever higher water mark on the shore. He illustrated it with Hellenic and Western progress, and to some extent Asiatic progress of the past. But I have wondered whether there are not, also, passages of history resembling the receding rather than the incoming sea.

Weekly lectures and daily lessons in the scriptures – mostly the New Testament – were part of our education because it was a missionary college. There was inattention and even a hostile attitude on the part of the students. This was, I think, the reaction to compulsion. I have, since then, read the Bible from cover to cover and much else of Christian literature with deep interest and respectful attention in the course of my intellectual voyage across the immense ocean of religious beliefs in various ages and among different people. I have found in the Sermon on the Mount, the Psalms, and in Isaiah and other prophets, and even in the epistles of the apostles, much of lasting sublimity. But at this time the Old Testament, specially Genesis, had enough in it for youthful sallies of mirth and ridicule. It was a wrong policy to teach youngsters such highly specialised items of sociological interest as Lot's daughters' desire for continuance of the seed, and the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah. I cannot help feeling that the approach of missionary zeal of this description – in every religion – is the opposite of that spirit which can evoke a just appreciation of the sublimity of prophetic and religious teaching. Principles taught without compulsion should be the right approach for stimulating deeper interest in the religions of man.

Literature and philosophy, among the subjects of my study, touched the most resonant of my mind's chords. We had incomparable guides to literature in Maulvi Shahjahan, who had the subtle power of teaching what was not to be found in the textbooks, and Charles Andrews. I was now on much better terms with Andrews and was receiving genuine encouragement, often in the shape of good remarks and high marks.

In philosophy, one was expected to learn what was provided, and the critical faculty was not encouraged. But, on the whole, what was prescribed was itself sufficiently stimulating to an inquiring mind. Although to most of my class fellows the subject was a narrow lane whose topography was all that was necessary to commit to memory, I was not satisfied and thrust myself in different directions to get a view of the byways which led out to the open vastnesses. It was a frightening prospect that lay in front of you at times. The determinist's mind was as horrifying a tyranny as the libertarian's freedom was a charter for aimless roaming. Looking back I am grateful for what I was taught, and as for what I was not taught at college, it was in any case to be found for oneself in the course of one's voyage through life.

Meanwhile, the interest in nationalist politics stirred in the final year of school by the movement against Bengal's partition continued to co-exist with the ambition of joining the Indian Civil Service of the imperial power. Asaf Ali writes:

Some of our teachers at St. Stephen's delivered frankly nationalistic lectures. *A Tale of Two Cities* was one of the books prescribed for study, and it provided an apt text for comments by one of our professors on pride in one's own country. This made no difference to the dream, which I continued to cherish, of entering the I.C.S. Rauf, Taqi and I enjoyed and admired Haider Riza's diatribes against the foreigners, and the next moment bent our heads over our lessons for tomorrow.

## NOTES

1. Included in *Armaghan-e-Asaf* published by Urdu Department, Delhi University, May 1966.
2. Now Zakir Hussain College.
3. Charles Darwin (1809-82), English naturalist famous for his work on *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859).
4. T.H. Huxley (1825-95), scientist and humanist who wrote in defence of Darwinism.
5. Ernest Haeckel (1834-1919), zoologist and proponent of Darwinism.
6. J.S. Mill (1806-73), philosopher and reformer famous for his work *On Liberty* (1859).
7. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Liberal thinker who put forward the theory of evolution even before the works of the naturalists Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. Spencer thought that individualism would come into its own only after an era of socialism and war.
8. Andrew Lang (1844-1912), man of letters with an interest in myth and ritual who published collections of fairy tales and advocated an empirical study of religion.

9. A radical nationalist, Tilak (1856-1920) utilised the traditional Ganapati and Shivaji festivals for promoting patriotic sentiment and came to be known as 'the father of Indian unrest'. He spent six years in jail at Mandalay in Burma for his part in the agitation against the partition of Bengal.
10. Deported to Burma in 1907 for leading a peasants' struggle in Punjab, Lajpatrai (1865-1928) was a patriot and social reformer. The severe lathi blows suffered by him at the hands of the police hastened his death.
11. One-sixteenth of a rupee, before decimalisation in the nineteen-fifties
12. He later moved to Calcutta on becoming Metropolitan.
13. Scholar and revolutionary, Har Dayal (1884-1939) gave up a scholarship awarded by the British Indian authorities in protest against the racial discrimination he encountered at Oxford. He taught Indian philosophy at Stanford and founded the revolutionary Ghadr Party along with like-minded Indian settlers in the U.S.A.
14. James Keir Hardie (1856-1915), Scottish coalminer who became a Labour Party leader. His speeches in India during his visit in 1907 were misrepresented in the British Press and he was accused of stirring up sedition.
15. Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews*, George Allen & Unwin, 1949. Brought out in India by Publications Division, New Delhi, 1971.
16. In a reference apparently to Asaf Ali who was Governor of Orissa in 1949, the authors of the biography of C.F. Andrews say (p.43): "One of his students vividly remembered the flashing scorn with which he commented to the class on the saying 'Honesty is the best policy' – that a mere ignoble prudence could never have achieved the past, and could never have power to inspire the future. The almost casual remark struck deep. There is no yard-stick to measure the impress of life on life, but there are men in high positions of influence in India today whose natural zeal was kindled, and whose ideals of human life were formed, by Andrews' classes at St. Stephen's College."

### 3. With Indian Notables in Europe

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With a few exceptions, the educated Indian elite at the turn of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th accepted British rule as part of the ordained scheme of things. It was not regarded as being inconsistent with self-respect, individual or national, to assist in the administration of Britain's Indian empire by working in the provincial services or in the Indian Civil Service which formed the apex of the structure. Indeed, among the demands of the early nationalists were greater Indianisation of the services, civil and military, and the holding of the annual competitive examination for the I.C.S. simultaneously in India instead of only in England.

Among the notable exceptions to this attitude was Shyamji Krishna Varma (1857-1930). He mastered both Sanskrit and English and was attracted by the teaching of Dayanand Saraswati (1825-83), who advocated social reform and propagated cultural nationalism based on pride in India's Vedic heritage. Returning to India after studying at Balliol College, Shyamji served as administrator in Ratlam and some other princely States, regarding them as old citadels of the country's freedom in contrast to 'British India' which was directly under the foreign heel.

When the British authorities made it impossible for Shyamji to function in India, he left in 1897 for England where the climate for freedom of expression was relatively more favourable. In 1899 when Britain declared war on Transvaal, wanting to annex this territory in southern Africa where gold and diamond fields had been discovered, Shyamji supported the Dutch-descended Boers in their fight against aggression. (This is in contrast to the attitude of young Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who, as a barrister in South Africa, assisted the British during the Boer war, and who during World War I – still believing in the bona fides of the British rulers – campaigned to secure Indian recruits to the British Indian Army). In relation to India and every country, Shyamji believed in the dictum of Herbert Spencer, the British thinker whom he greatly admired, that "Resistance to aggression is not simply justified but

imperative." These words served as the motto for *The Indian Sociologist*, a political monthly which Shyamji started in London in 1904. He also instituted a scheme of scholarships in memory of Shivaji and of the heroes of the 1857 Uprising, for Indian students who wished to pursue higher studies in England. A condition attached to these scholarships was that the recipient would not, after his return to India, accept any paid post or honorary office under the British. This was a remarkable presage of an important plank of the non-cooperation movement which Mahatma Gandhi was to launch in the nineteen-twenties.

It is not widely known that there was an India House, at Highgate, much before the present building of that name in Aldwych which houses the Indian High Commission in London. Or that a Home Rule for India Society was established in England a decade before the Home Rule League of Annie Besant in Madras and of Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra. The original India House was opened by Shyamji Krishna Verma to provide board and lodging for Indian students, specially those who won the scholarships instituted by him. The object of the Home Rule for India Society, founded by him on 18th February 1905, was to "obtain for India what was its indefeasible right--a government of the people, by the people and for the people."

While London was hospitable in those days to refugees from the rival imperialist countries of the European continent, there were definite limits to the British government's tolerance of critics of its own colonialism. Shyamji had to shift his headquarters and his journal to Paris (which did not grudge protection to rebels against its British rival). He left India House at Highgate in the care of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), a younger revolutionary who had come to London in 1906. Savarkar, with commendation from Bal Gangadhar Tilak, had applied for and secured a Shyamji scholarship named after Shivaji.

Another great Indian who did not conform to the then prevailing norms of the Indian elite was Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), the future sage of Pondicherry. Though he passed the I.C.S. examination with high distinction, on return to India in 1893 he preferred to enter the service of the patriotic and progressive ruler of Baroda State, Sayaji Rao Gaekwad (1863-1939). Aurobindo later threw himself into the movement against the partition of Bengal.

### **Lure of the I.C.S.**

Typical of the attitude prevalent among English-educated Indians at the beginning of the 20th century was Motilal Nehru (1861-1931). Commanding a highly lucrative practice at the bar, he sent his son Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) to school and college in England. Motilal entertained the hope of entry into the I.C.S. both for his son and for an orphaned nephew, older to Jawaharlal, whom he was bringing up. Motilal writes on 8th August 1908 to Brijlal Nehru, the

nephew, who was then in England: "Just one year of hard work, really hard work, and you can make yourself a hero. I am looking forward to the day when Reuter will cable across the seas to India that Mr. B. Nehru of Allahabad heads the list of successful candidates of the I.C.S."<sup>1</sup>

Motilal changed his mind about the I.C.S. after some time. But it was not so much on the ground of patriotism as because of disillusionment with the I.C.S. as a career for an Indian in contrast to the prospects in an independent profession like law, as well as a growing conviction that recruitment of Indians to the I.C.S. was not being made purely on merit. On 24th June 1910 Motilal writes to his son: "The next thing is to settle what is to be done for the future... I stick to my decision for the Bar unless you have changed your mind. There are no prospects at all in the I.C.S... Every opportunity is taken to humiliate the Indian members of the I.C.S. The one occasion any notice is taken of you is when you secure a good place in the competition. You come back here, are posted to some outlandish district and are soon forgotten. The Bar on the other hand offers the highest position and rank to the really deserving members of it."<sup>2</sup> In a letter of 11th October 1910 to his cousin Bansi Dhar Nehru, Motilal says: "I am day by day being confirmed in the belief that the Civil Service Commissioners are actuated by political motives in selecting candidates... This is one of the numerous reasons which induced me to withdraw Jawahar from the I.C.S. There was no Indian in the list of successful candidates last year, and we have only Mr. Amir Ali's <sup>3</sup> son this year! I cannot for the life of me bring myself to believe that out of the numerous Bengali and other Hindu candidates having brilliant academical careers behind them, there was not one who could beat a mediocre like Waris Amir Ali."<sup>4</sup>

That young Asaf Ali should have entertained the ambition of going to England for higher studies and competing for the I.C.S. was thus in tune with the aspirations of the English-educated middle class of the time. It is another matter that after going to England he changed his preference from the I.C.S. to law. Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Asaf Ali studied at the Inns of Court in London and qualified as Barristers-at-law at about the same time, but the two did not happen to meet. Jawaharlal, not greatly interested in politics at that time, was not a visitor to Savarkar's India House which Asaf Ali used to frequent. Whereas Jawaharlal, born to affluence, never took seriously to the practice of law, Asaf Ali was to earn his living as a lawyer.

Asaf Ali had been able to join college because his paternal mother was extending financial support. But the scale of assistance was not such as to meet the cost of higher education abroad. That Asaf Ali was able to proceed to England in 1909 was due to unexpected help from a friend of the family who was a senior official at Simla. Asaf Ali recalls:

**From my early years I used to hear about some persons, in high places, who had been colleagues and friends of my father and of his brother. I wanted to make their acquaintance to find out all I could about the departed**

ones. These friends had been on the same level as my father, but had risen high in the police service during the years since his death. I often wondered why fate was cruel to my father and uncle who died so young, and cruel incidentally to me. I had shown promise, and if either of them had been alive I would surely have been sent to a school and university in England, and may have found the I.C.S. a natural and easy sequel. But these were only might-have-beens, and I kept hoping that my grandmother would risk everything and enable me to study in England for the I.C.S. or for the English Bar. However, this meant raising a loan on the village, and there was a formidable obstacle in the way of so bold a throw of the dice. My paternal aunt--the only living child of my grandmother--had a powerful voice in all financial matters, and she had not yet despaired of an issue. (Much later, on her dying childless, I became her sole heir.)

It was eventually a friend and colleague of my father's, a highly placed official, who made it possible for me to go to England. In 1906, when I was in my final year at the Anglo-Arabic School, somebody gave me the address of a close friend of my father's. I wrote him a nice letter expressing the hope that some day I would have the good fortune of meeting him. He replied from Simla expressing joy at hearing from me, and said that he was going to be attached to the camp of the Prince of Wales (George V) and would soon be in Delhi. To me this came as the glad promise of an early meeting with someone who was as nearly an uncle as anybody could be without being a blood relation.

One day I had a letter from Simla Uncle announcing his arrival and giving me the number of his tent in the Prince of Wales' Camp below the historic Ridge of Delhi. I went and found a fine, dignified person with a powerful yet kindly presence. He talked of my father and uncle, and assured me that he would watch me with the interest of a real uncle. He was pleased with my performance in the matriculation examination and approved of my resolution to go up to the university. He said he would visit and pay his respects to my grandmother another time when he was freer. I was greatly pleased with this interview and kept up regular correspondence with him. He had given me Kennedy Lodge as his address in Simla, and I used to add 'Deputy Commissioner' after his name, not having the vaguest idea of his official position.

Uncle used to visit Delhi twice or thrice a year. On each occasion he would look us up and would ascertain from me, with kindly interest, how I was faring at college. In 1909 my friend Haider Riza secured a Shyamji scholarship and was preparing to leave for England. Knowing how keen I was to have a similar opportunity, Uncle at this point offered to make it possible for me to go to England and study for the Bar or the I.C.S. I was overjoyed.

It was unthinkable to leave my one true friend, Rauf, and go away for

several years. I therefore persuaded him to scrape together what he could and make a bid to qualify himself as an engineer from an English university. This was the career he was looking forward to. Rauf's father at first jibbed, because of the high expense. But eventually he risked everything and staked his whole property on it.

My mother was opposed to my going to England. She had never parted from me, and to her I was still too young to go away for three years to a strange country. And my maternal grandmother lay seriously ill. I consulted Hakim Ajmal Khan Sahib<sup>5</sup>, who said: "By staying here you cannot save her if she must go; but she won't, and you can go with an easy conscience." Grandmother did survive, and lived for some years after my final return from England at the turn of 1914. But, alas, I did not know that I was parting from my favourite maternal aunt, who was only a year older than me, never to see her again.

## **Encounter with the West**

Asaf Ali describes the mixed feelings with which he left India, and his first reactions to the encounter with the West:

When I got on board the boat at Bombay, it was for the first time in my life that I saw a ship, and the sea on which she sailed. Rauf and I watched with fascinated attention the scenes of embarkation, the curling waves all round, and the imperceptible moving away of the steamship from the dock. The moment the boat got clear of the pier and faced about to pull out to the horizon-bound sea, I felt a pang of separation. My thoughts flew to my home and my mother's tearful face, and the catch in her voice as she struggled to say, "God be with you!" What was she doing, thinking, or saying now? How was she feeling? The excitement of the adventure, which had so far sustained my spirits, melted in a mist of unshed tears.

Meanwhile the bell for breakfast was calling us down to the dining hall. At the table I had my first trial of quickly taking in unfamiliar faces, manners, and foreign food. I was orthodoxly brought up, and pork or ham were to be avoided. Rationalism could not over-ride my scruples. The smell of the dining room mixed with the peculiar smell of the boat and the sea water made me feel sickish, and before hors-d'oeuvre was over I had to leave the table. I hated the smell of the boat and therefore spent most of my time on the deck. Rauf was practically confined to his cabin all the way, and this took half the fun out of the voyage for me. Haider Riza was tough and ate when everyone else was unable to get out of his bunk.

The passengers on board the ship were a polyglot crowd. An incident brought home to me the true relations between the English and the French--in spite of the *entente cordiale* so recently celebrated following King Edward's visit to Paris. Some French children while playing drew a



French flag on the deck, and an English child of their age offended them by walking, or rather trampling, on it. Then these French kids drew the Union Jack, spat on it and trampled it under their feet. This nearly caused a storm among the elders. But the mischief did not go further

The voyage was otherwise very pleasant. My mind began to experience a wholly new sensation as, day after day, my eyes dwelt on the immensity, the uninterrupted vastness and unbounded expanse--except for the horizon--of the blue sea. The answering immensities, above and below, bracketing the pin-point of the steamboat, awakened in me an impalpable and vaguely felt intimation of the mystery of Creation.

When we had sailed for a day in the Mediterranean, we were caught in a storm which nearly sent the boat to the bottom of the sea. It became a cockle-shell surrounded by mountain-high waves and lay in a deep trough or on the summit of the waves, alternately. One of her engines stopped working, and for thirty hours or a little longer the Captain remained on the alert. The sea appeared through the porthole as rough as ever, and I was as sick as I could be. I did some rapid thinking and decided that I wouldn't care to drown (I couldn't swim), and my hollowground 'cut-throat' should come to my rescue. What a race of memories and thoughts took place in my mind during those interminable hours!

The Captain finally pulled into the creek of a small island near Crete where the boat lay anchor<sup>1</sup> for 24 hours for repairs. We reached Marseilles full two days late, and as a ship had sailed past us during the storm, it was feared that our boat was seriously damaged or lost. Our arrival at Marseilles was an occasion for rejoicing among those who were waiting anxiously there.

Watching the charming boulevards and the showily dressed shop-windows of Marseilles, the cafes and eating places, men and women moving together in the streets, the uniform type of dress, the common use of mechanical appliances and gadgets, the hurry and bustle, and the blaze of lights in the evening, I said to myself: "So, Europe is all light, uniformity, mechanism, bustle, and freedom of women." Delhi of those days was very different in all these respects. I liked the change, and subconsciously began to fall in step with Europe.

Our next stage was Paris. Riza had written to his benefactor Shyamji, who instructed one of his lieutenants, Rana <sup>6</sup>, to receive us. We were taken by him to an English family hotel which afforded us our first acquaintance with European accommodation and way of living. After dinner, Rauf and I ventured out for a walk, leaving Riza closeted with Shyamji Krishna Varma who had dropped in. A guide offered to show us Paris. And his very first shot was a maison where I was reduced to a nonplus by the hospitality of half-nude young women. What could be wrong about finding out what was in a closed, and frightfully fascinating book so far? No,

there was something about it which was not right. Rauf, the maturer of the two, laughed at my hasty and cowardly retreat. I rushed out and breathed freely.

The next three days Rana took us round to the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe, Eiffel Tower and other Parisian landmarks. I went from place to place with the insatiable curiosity of a virgin mind and the unbounded joy, at every step, of an impressionable and observant child. The tablet of my mind was being crowded with deep impressions, and I was drinking everything up in huge draughts. But some of the old habits of thought resisted the onset of the new. The nude statues (I was yet to see the wealth of erotic Indian sculpture), the semi-nude actresses, and the freedom with which wine was consumed--in fact as a substitute for water--shocked me. There were also certain habits of the western civilised world which appeared barbaric, for instance the absence of ablutionary arrangements in the water-closet, and the wallowing in bath tubs in preference to bathing with fresh water.

Later on, after the flood of novelty and the dazzling effect of western lights had exacted their full tribute of admiration, I had time to think and compare the material and moral elements of this new world and of the old from which I came. There was much in western culture and its scientific spirit which left the worn-out and fatigued East leagues behind. But surely our decline was a natural turn in the ineluctable processes of nature. No morning, no spring, no majestic pageant of the starry night could last longer than its appointed period in the Book of Time. We had reached the summit of our destiny, and gone to sleep exhausted by the exertion. But even in the stillness of the dark night, and even in the passivity of sleep we dreamed the dreams of the living day, and the texture of our half-conscious life was of the actual stuff we had known in its perfection. I thought of the names of our servants, men and women: Zamurad, Ilmas, Nilam, Yakut, Yasmin and Sosan (Emerald and Diamond, Sapphire and Ruby and other precious stones for men as well as women; and for women, Jasmine and Persian Lily and other flowers); and I thought of the names of textiles – Shabnam and Abirawan, Gulbadan and Kamkhwab (dew, flowing limpidity, rose-body and rare-dream). I wondered at the richness of poetry and culture that had bequeathed this romantic heritage to the commonest of my world, who even in their poverty and squalor used these words in their dealings every day. Were they not signs of a fuller and happier life than Europe was enjoying today? Perhaps not, perhaps yes!

Of the Indians living in Paris, it was only Rana, the charming Gujarati with a beautiful German wife whom I saw a good deal and talked to. One of the leading pearl dealers, he had lived there for years and was a kind of fairy godfather to new-comers. I had only a brief meeting with Shyamji Krishna Varma, who looked like a sturdy well-built Quaker, with a Quaker

hat. He divided his time between editing his journal, *The Indian Sociologist*, an organ of advanced nationalism ('anarchism' was the term used by the British), and the Paris stock exchange. Having had to leave London because he had incurred the ire of British officialdom, he was now living in Switzerland but the stock exchange brought him to Paris every now and then.

After a week in Paris we left for London via Bologne-Folkstone. The crossing from Bologne to Folkstone was exceptionally rough. The English Channel is never calm; its chopping is entirely its own, and very disagreeable. But once we had got away from smoke-sodden and crowded Folkestone, I was fascinated during the journey to London by the green meadows and heaths of England. They have a freshness and a soothing softness best expressed by the Persian word *shadabi*. You do not so much see as feel the verdure.

At Charing Cross terminus Riza, Rauf and I were met by one Govind, an inmate of India House--Shyamji Krishna Varma's house now occupied by Savarkar and his group--and we drove in a cab to Highgate. We found that India House was fairly big and well situated. Regular residents were not many; they included a taciturn Punjabi, Madanlal Dhingra (who was soon to create a sensation by assassinating a British official in London, and the genial scholar V.V.S. Aiyer<sup>7</sup> of Madras. But at the weekly meetings on Sundays, the gathering at India House would swell to 20 or 30. One or other would be voted to the chair and somebody would read a paper or deliver a speech, followed by discussion. India House was a rendezvous for politically minded Indian youths, and a training ground for prospective public men and revolutionaries.

Haider Riza expected to be hailed as a genius, and conducted himself as one. But Savarkar was the presiding deity of India House and was already well entrenched. Riza attempted to establish his oratorical supremacy at the very first Sunday social after our arrival. Savarkar was in the chair and someone set the ball rolling. As an experienced debater, Riza waited and spoke last in order to make an impression. Rauf and I, though we were his admirers, had to confess that apart from the handicap of English--not that he wielded English with diffidence, but there was an obvious difference between his mastery of Urdu and of English--he appeared to be too histrionic to carry that conviction which pure sincerity with even halting expression and mutilated grammar never fails to do. Savarkar, on the other hand, despite his careless English, had so genuine a ring of sincerity in his speech that he almost always made a memorable impact on the audience. Riza definitely suffered by contrast, and that decided his fugitive relationship with India House. He soon moved out and, after a short stay in London, went to Oxford. There he settled down as a coach to Indian students doing their responsions<sup>8</sup> or even schools. This suited Riza so well

that he stayed there for well over twenty years.

The visitors to India House for the Sunday get-togethers included several who were already prominent in India's public life or were soon to become well known. Bepin Chandra Pal, veteran of the movement against Bengal's partition, came occasionally. His son Niranjan Pal (Nanu) was a close friend of Savarkar's and was a frequent visitor. Dr. K.P. Jaiswal, the historian, was one of the stars. Other visitors included W.V. Phadke who assisted Savarkar in translating the work on the 1857 Uprising; Sikandar Hayat (later Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan) who became Premier of the Punjab; and Saklatwala, later to be a Communist member of the British parliament. It was at India House that I first met Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (brother of the poetess Sarojini Naidu), who was to become a close personal friend.

On special occasions the India House group would organise functions in larger premises. A notable event was the Dussehra dinner organised in August 1909 at Nizamuddin's Indian restaurant at Bayswater, where the guest of honour was Mr. (not yet Mahatma) Gandhi, hero of the civil resistance campaign by Indians in South Africa. He had come to London to present the case of the Indian settlers before the British government. But his speech was very brief--just a dozen sentences or so--and tepidly moderate. He concluded abruptly with the words, "I should not like to stand between you and the speaker of the evening, Mr. Savarkar." Dazzlingly brilliant was Savarkar's speech that evening. His theme was the struggle between Rama and Ravana, between righteousness and unrighteousness. He compared it dexterously with its modern counterpart, the struggle of subject India against British rule.

Within a fortnight of our stay in India House, Rauf and I decided to move out of it. For one thing, the food served there defied description. It was called Indian, but Indian is such an imprecise label where food, language and manners are concerned. And here there were Madrasis, Maharattas and Punjabis, each so far apart in tastes. Secondly, the atmosphere in India House, surcharged with politics, got on my nerves. I wanted to build for myself my own private world.

Rauf and I shifted to the house of a Scotch family in Finsbury Park, a new and pleasant locality. The family of Mr. Wills, which took us in as lodgers and boarders, was trying this experiment for the first time. It was a homely and agreeable atmosphere, and now we could start off with our social and academic activities in peace. We had much to do by way of outfitting ourselves. And we began to go sightseeing, visiting the theatres, and generally acquainting ourselves with London and its life.

Within two or three days of our arrival in the first week of May, London experienced one of the heaviest snowfalls. This was my first experience of snow and it fascinated me. Until early summer, moonlight snow con-

jured up magic dreams. But the thawing, with its bruising cold and slush and mud, produced contrary feelings. By the beginning of June the dark ghosts of leafless trees began to put out buds of sheeny green, which seemed to whistle soft music. Towards the close of the month London (but not the business quarters, or East End) presented the look of a well-groomed garden marred by an overgrowth of brick and mortar but even then not unpleasant. Lilac, may and laburnam, almond and peach blossom ran riot in Finsbury Park.

Summer in Europe generally is the carnival of nature's wizardry. Only when one has partaken of this feast of the senses can one realise why the Greeks and the Romans worshipped nature with the robust passion of lovers, rather than worshipping deities who demand the sacrifice of the senses. The East in her vigorous youth--Vedic India for instance--was, I believe, no less robust, no less sturdy in her outlook. But only in the cold countries of Europe and Asia, where winter strips the trees to their bare bones, does the return of spring and summer spell a sensuous sorcery that is rare in warmer climes.

One evening at the home of the Wills our landlady wondered whether we would like some music, and we enthusiastically supported her request to the younger daughter, Lorrie Wills, to sing. She was a soprano. The music sounded weird to our ears, but it did not take us longer than three months to begin to appreciate Western music. Indians and non-Indians require some time to understand one another's musical art. This is because music despite its infinity of soul has a specific external structure. You cannot give shape to water except by holding it in vessels of whatsoever shape. Nor can you say that the liquid is of the shape of your flask or cup. Music is like liquid, and it is capable of assuming any shape. Each songbird in nature's immense auditorium may regard its own performance as the best. The nightingale, the bulbul, the thrush, the oriole and other species know only the songs they have inherited. They little realise that in the grand orchestration to which they contribute their share, they are complementary to one another and only the eternal and universal auricle is capable of taking it all in as one symphony.

Similar thoughts passed through my mind when, in the course of our sight-seeing, I viewed St. Paul's Cathedral from outside and felt that it compared unfavourably with the Jama Masjid of Delhi. But soon I told myself that such comparisons are irrelevant. It is wrong to assess architecture at its best by what we are accustomed to. I was surprised when, many years afterwards, I found the great writer Aldous Huxley, in his *Jesting Pilate*, drawing a comparison between the Taj Mahal and St. Paul's Cathedral to the latter's advantage. Surely one cannot compare a fine rose and a perfect chrysanthemum, or an arum lily and a double tulip, and register one's preference on the score of beauty!

Meanwhile Rauf and I were trying to settle what course of study we should pursue, and where. We decided to visit the two celebrated universities. He went to survey Cambridge and I to Oxford; we were to compare notes on our return to determine whether we wanted to join either. Rauf was still thinking of engineering, and I had not given up the idea of I.C.S. He returned dejected for he found it too expensive. And I returned with a distaste for Oxford because I ran into only the wrong type of its alumni--as had happened earlier at Aligarh. Rauf and I both opted, instead, for law. We also decided to move from Finsbury Park. He went to live with a family in Kingstown on Thames, and I moved to Sinclair Road, and later to Oldfield Lodge, Acton Vale.

We joined Lincoln's Inn because some friends had commended it, and also because Lord Morley, then Secretary of State for India, and the Prince of Wales (George V) belonged to it. We were also told that 'our' dining hall was the best for the quality of food. Wine was free, and even a bottle of champagne or hock on guest nights, which recurred once every term. (I was shocked at first when I saw some of the Muslim fellow-students drinking wine.) Further arguments we heard in favour of Lincoln's Inn were that its library had the best collection of law books and that Lincoln's Inn fields were noted for their horticulture. And eventually it did not matter from which of the four Inns of Court we were called to the Bar!

### **Savarkar and Dhingra**

Dhananjay Keer begins the preface to his biography<sup>9</sup> of Savarkar by quoting Asaf Ali's summing up of the great revolutionary as the embodiment of "the spirit of Shivaji". The following further remarks by Asaf Ali are quoted in the course of the biography: "I wonder how so young a person (Savarkar in 1909) commanded the will of almost everyone who came into contact with him...nor is it an exaggeration to say that Savarkar is one of the few really effective speakers I have known and heard, and there is hardly an orator of the first rank either here or in England whom I have not had the privilege of hearing."

Savarkar's belief in revolutionary methods was disapproved by Gandhiji, who wrote: "I came in contact with every known Indian anarchist in London. Their bravery impressed me but I felt that their zeal was misguided. I felt that violence was no remedy for India's ills." However, Savarkar justified the recourse to violent methods in these words in the opening issue of *Talwar* ('Sword'), a journal started by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya from Paris in November 1909: "We feel no special love for secret organisations or surprise and secret warfare... It would be...a crime to talk of revolution when there is a constitution that allows the fullest and freest development of a nation. Only because you deny us light, we gather in darkness to compass means to knock

out the fetters that hold our Mother down. You rule by bayonets...It is a mockery to talk of constitutional agitation when no constitution exists."<sup>10</sup> Savarkar was of the view that Gandhiji's method of passive resistance was bound to fail "because it presupposes all men to be selfless and (that they) will not cooperate with the aggressor"; further, it "blindly presumes that the aggressor has a high sense of morality."

After moving out of India House, Asaf Ali went there almost every week for the Sunday gathering. This meant, he says, "a meeting, some speeches and tea. You had to pay a small subscription for this privilege." Asaf Ali recalls:

Sometimes readings were given out of Savarkar's history of the War of Independence. He had turned his opportunities to work in the India Office library to good account by collecting the material for his survey of the events of 1857 from the Indian point of view.

One day, in late June 1909, I was voted to the chair. I used to participate in the debates very rarely, for I was really raw, and exceptionally shy at this stage. I felt both awkward and secretly flattered at this compliment, little suspecting that it would prove to be the last debate in India House.

As usual Nirenjan Pal sang a Bengali patriotic song on 'Our Country' which was even more popular than *Bande Mataram* in those days. The proceedings began in the half-bare drawing room. After 35 years I cannot recall the motion the House debated. But at the end of the session, when the gathering was dispersing to the garden for tea, I found Madanlal Dhingra hanging back, and begging Nanu to sing some other song and play on the organ. Dhingra was a most rare bird -- a wistful, uncommunicative person who gave you the impression of being cross with life. He attended every meeting, never spoke, and was seldom noticed by anybody. That day he was in a strange mood, and looked hungry for something. I thought that he was feeling terribly nostalgic. As Nanu's Bengali song, for which I stayed on, did not satisfy Dhingra's longing for an Urdu song, he turned to me with his request. I went to the organ, and sang and played an Urdu Ghazal and a Thumri. He went into a transport of joy, which seemed to me rather extravagant. I left him looking out of the drawing-room window in what appeared a far-away state of mind. All this got fixed in my memory by carefully recollecting every detail, when what is to follow called for these recollections.

Three or four days after, just as I was sitting down to breakfast in my new digs on Sinclair Road, the newspaper boy came along shouting, "Murder, murder in West End". They did not use to take any newspaper in that house, and I had not yet made my own arrangements. In any case a murder in West End--or East End--was scarcely a matter for excitement for me. But my only fellow-boarder, a Dutch, rose from the table and went out to buy the newspaper. The first thing he said on coming in was: "One of your

countrymen has murdered an Englishman--a high official." That horrified me and roused my curiosity. He offered me the paper, and I was nearly stupefied to find that it was Dhingra who had shot Sir Curzon Wylie at a meeting at the Imperial Institute. And then I recalled the fact that I was to have gone to this meeting myself, but as I had not yet got an evening dress I could not go.

Dhingra was arrested on the spot. He had on his person a written statement which the police confiscated. Savarkar made available a copy to the *Daily News* of London, which published it on the morning of 16th August 1909--a day before the sentence of death passed on Dhingra was carried out at the gallows. The statement read: "I believe that a nation held in bondage...with the help of foreign bayonets is in a perpetual state of war. Since open battle is rendered impossible to a disarmed race, I attacked by surprise."

Savarkar's was the lone voice of dissent at a meeting organised by Indians at Caxton Hall in London to condemn the killing of Curzon Wylie. Among those who participated in the meeting were Bepin Chandra Pal and Surendranath Bannerji. Asaf Ali recalls:

The India House group decided to protest against any condemnation of an under-trial, for the case was still sub judice. The objection was unexceptionable on grounds of law. While the resolution was being moved, Savarkar rose on a point of order, and had hardly completed his objection when some voices from the dais shouted, 'Turn him out, put him out of the hall!' Some members of the audience rushed towards him, one of them striking him with his umbrella and wounding him above the eyebrow and on the cheek. (The assailants were Indians). A bobbie intervened and gently led Savarkar out into the adjoining room, where he received first aid. The meeting resumed but came to a hurried end, and I remember noticing Surendranath Bannerji walking down the passage and stairs with a scowl of distress on his face.

This incident led to the dispersal of the India House group. Savarkar and his immediate followers crossed over to Paris, and later Chatto also shifted there. Contradictory feelings prevailed among the Indians in London. Some felt that the killing of Curzon Wylie had made things worse for Indians, and some that it had served as a timely signal of the end of an era, the era of treating Indians as a subject race.

Savarkar was suspected by the British authorities of complicity in the killing of Curzon Wylie, and to be the author of Dhingra's statement. As bad luck would have it, Savarkar who was safe in Paris was prevailed upon by his close friend Niranjana Pal--so both Madam Cama<sup>11</sup> and Chatto told me later--to return to England. Ignoring the warnings of friends in Paris, Savarkar sailed for England to join Nanu. On landing at Dover he was arrested, and legal proceedings were launched for his extradition to India. During these proceedings Nanu Pal got into the hands of some gangsters



who passed themselves off as Irish patriots and offered to arrange for Savarkar's rescue by way-laying the prison van which carried him to the court and back. This story, too, I had from Madam Cama and Chatto, both of whom were bitter about the whole episode. The luckless escapade ended with the gangsters robbing Nanu of whatever money they could get--about 100 pounds.

Savarkar, however, provided a story far more thrilling than the blocking of a Black Maria in a London street. On his way to India, heavily guarded by the police, on 8th July 1910 he jumped out of a porthole of the ship and swam ashore at Marseilles. But a French gendarme handed Savarkar back to the escort. The issue of political asylum was later taken by the French Government, prodded by French socialists at the instance of Rana and Madam Cama, to the International Tribunal at the Hague. John (later Lord) Simon argued on behalf of the British Government and won a favourable verdict from the Tribunal. How the judgment went against France is a mystery, for Savarkar did actually touch French soil and his restoration to his captors was clearly an error on the part of the gendarme.

After being tried in India by a special court, Savarkar was sentenced to transportation for life (25 years) and forfeiture of all his property. The same court then tried him on another charge and awarded the sentence of a second transportation for life--not to run concurrently with but to follow after the first. Considering that a man has but one life, Savarkar asked, how could he be sentenced to two transportations? British colonial justice ignored the objection. Savarkar was sent to the cellular jail at Port Blair in the Andamans in July 1911.

Following appeals by Gandhiji and C.F. Andrews among others, Savarkar was brought back to the mainland in 1921 and kept in prison at Ratnagiri. In January 1924 he was freed but required to stay within Ratnagiri district, and to abstain from political activity. Savarkar worked for the removal of untouchability and admission of depressed class children to schools, on the one hand, and, on the other, against Muslim and Christian proselytising activity. He promoted the movement for Shuddhi, or the ceremony of purification of those who had become outcasts on conversion but wished to return to the Hindu fold. All restrictions on Savarkar were finally lifted only in 1937, at the time of the formation of elected provincial governments. He became president of the Hindu Mahasabha in December 1937, and served in that capacity for several terms thereafter.

In a note on the margin added in 1948, Asaf Ali remarks in his unfinished autobiography:

How the wheel of destiny has turned in the opposite direction today! After Mahatma Gandhi's assassination Savarkar's house was raided by an angry mob and the police rescued and guarded him. The irate mob appeared to have suspected him of some connection with Mahatmaji's assassin.

## **Law, Letters and Politics**

The first part of Asaf Ali's sojourn in England lasted nearly three years, from May 1909 to January 1912. The study of law occupied less of his time and attention during this period than literature, philosophy, politics and a romantic interest in the opposite sex. Asaf Ali writes:

One studying for the Bar in those days was a gentleman at large, and was not bound to attend any lectures. All one had to do was to 'keep his terms', which meant eating six dinners every term in the Hall of the Inn to which one belonged, and taking one's own time to pass the prescribed examinations whenever it suited one. You put yourself down, in a book kept for the purpose, for any examination or several of them in any term. I had kept some six out of the 12 terms necessary for the 'call', without taking a single examination and my friends were getting worried over my slackness. One of them, by way of a joke, went and put me down for Roman Law while I was away in Paris.

It was only a bare week before the examination when I returned. I did not know a word of the subject. Though it was open to me not to appear for the examination, I gritted my teeth and set to work, shutting myself in my bedroom for the week. There was time only for acquiring a nodding acquaintance with Justinian and his Institutes, not for extensive or deep study. On the eighth day I walked into the examination hall with a sure step, and the result brought me out a good third. This exhilarating experience had the effect of making me treat the remaining examinations lightly. I read what pleased me most at the time: poetry, literature, history, philosophy, anything but law. I had given up all thoughts of the I.C.S. mainly from a repugnance to industry. I even dreamt dreams of releasing my soul in poetry and plays. How magnificent is the confidence of adolescence. The boisterous sea of life with its buffeting storms appeared like a calm lake. All you felt you had to do was to push your sweet little skiff away from its moorings, and row smoothly to your destination.

Rauf and I decided to join the Rationalist Press Association (of which I had been a member by correspondence for two years) and to educate ourselves, in addition to our legal studies, in a general way. But we soon dropped the Association's meetings for, beyond the satisfaction of being in Fleet Street and in a place associated with Dr. Johnson, there was nothing there which one could not get from their publications. The premises were rather discouraging for their bareness and austerity. One met only dry old men and lanky spinsters. They were so senior to us in age and learning that it was a mockery to pretend that you had anything in common with them except your desire not to allow naked reality and reason to be overwhelmed by embroidered superstition and credulity.

For relaxation we often visited the theatres which, along with newspapers, struck me as informal and interesting sources of liberal

education. There was no radio in those days, and even talkies were in their infancy. I chose as my sport and pastime, consistently with my early training as a gymnast, roller-skating which was in great vogue in those days. I acquired proficiency to the degree of 'fancy skating', and this led to an indulgence which claimed most of my free evenings. It was great fun, and I was never in much want of partners for dancing on the rink because I made a good partner. Private theatricals were another pastime. The common room of Lincoln's Inn gave us free stationery, cheap but good lunches and teas, and we could invite friends to meet us there. It became our rendezvous and club. Some of us who were deeply interested in literature and art formed our own group. I came to be looked upon, in this group, as a sort of specialist of the 'decadents'--Walter Fater, Oscar Wilde, Ibsen and so on.

My passion for George Bernard Shaw arose in a somewhat romantic fashion. One day I took the bus for Piccadilly where I was to meet someone, and happened to share a seat on the top of the bus with a young lady. I noticed an open book in her hand--not unusual in trains or on buses, but she was looking into the book only occasionally and seemed to be learning it by heart. A look at the book confirmed my guess. It was *Arms and the Man*, and she was memorising a part. I thought it was perhaps for private theatricals. As chance would have it, both of us got down near Cupid's Fountain nearly opposite the Criterion theatre where the crowd was quite thick, and I politely offered to help her across. A further vagary of the traffic held us up on the intervening island, and suddenly I made up my mind to ask her if I could see her again. We had to hurry across the street, and landed at the entrance of the Criterion where she thanked me and was about to enter the theatre, when I plucked up courage enough to stammer out my question. She smiled sweetly, took a step forward, threw her head back (actress fashion) and drawled out in a melodious voice with what appeared to be a dramatic instinct, "Probably never", and vanished behind the box office. I was in my early twenties and not altogether unpresentable, and she looked the same age and perfectly charming. Now "probably never" was a polite slap, but not such as to deter you from running a further risk. I could not guess her name, for the notice of the play disclosed two or three women characters. So the best course was to go to the box office, reserve a seat in the first row of the stalls, and not miss the first night. And on my way to the Common Room, I went into my bookseller's and secured the complete works of G.B.S. I read *Arms and the Man* and some other plays, lying in a corner of Lincoln's Inn fields amid tulips. The most consequential sequel was the appreciation of G.B.S.'s credit in my eyes. The other sequel was a squib that did not go off, although I found "probably never" only two seats to my left in the theatre with a middled-aged person, probably her father. I could only guess

that she was an understudy, and most probably the younger sister of the principal lady in the play to whom she bore a strong resemblance. And that was the tame ending of an anticipated romance.

I gave myself more credit in those days in certain respects than perhaps I deserved. I thought I knew a lot about philosophy and a lot more about poetry, and the facility with which I could versify gave me ground to imagine that I would make my mark in English poetry. My vanity was fed and fanned by two friends, Abdur Rahman Bijnori and Rauf, who were men of gifts and discernment. Chatto, however, was the jesting Pilate. While he acknowledged what merit he could detect, he left no doubt in my mind about the dewy film of poetic decoration which covered the slender substance of 'baby prattle'.

Another friend whose opinion I valued was Syud Hossain. He had come from India with the reputation of a prodigy and joined Lincoln's Inn and the Common Room. Somewhat older than me, he had contemptuously rejected the pursuit of degrees and had come to London as a journalist. The Bar was his second string to the bow. I was initially hesitant to admit his claim to distinction as a speaker and writer of English, but I was attracted to him and was desirous of his friendship. One day we engaged in a discussion that lasted till the small hours of the morning and was concluded under the lamp post on the pavement under my window. That sealed a friendship for life. Syud, like Chatto, liked my poem 'Destroyer of the Soul'. But when, two years later, Syud sent it for opinion to J.C. Squire (now Sir John Squire), it was returned with the remark that it read like a good parody of Masfield. That decided me for good, and I plucked off the half-opened bud. It was no use hoping to blossom on an alien stalk. Urdu was my mother tongue, and in Urdu alone I should seek my refuge and the medium of expression.

Asaf Ali, as a student in London, admired the courage and intellect of nationalist revolutionaries like Savarkar and his associates, and of the Marxist revolutionary Virendranath Chattopadhyaya. But the methods espoused by them did not appeal to him. However, Asaf Ali reacted instinctively against racism and colonial domination. He writes:

Rauf and I had been in London only a few months when what was then talked about as an event of great significance took place. It was the All Races' Congress. We enrolled as delegates. India was represented by Brojendra Lal Seal, the venerable Bengali scholar who presided over one of the sessions of the Congress and also read a learned paper. Persia was represented by Mirza Mohammed Yahya, a typical *alim* who spoke French with fluency and understood English. Then there were Prof. Dubois and others from Africa and elsewhere. The proceedings of the Congress were published in the form of a book which I have in my library. It is a good collection of articles on sociology and anthropology, and made a great

impression on my young mind.

One incident left an indelible impression. Someone read a paper on miscegenation and, in the debate that followed, arguments were advanced both for and against it. The most forceful of the speeches was by a stalwart mulatto scholar who stood physically head and shoulders above all the Europeans present on the dais. While arguing for miscegenation, he struck his broad and ample chest with his hand and said: "I am a miscegene, and I don't suppose any of you would say that I do not compare favourably with anyone here or elsewhere who may boast of purity of blood", or words to that effect. The argument seemed fairly unanswerable. He was, however, opposed by a lean and splenetic Englishman who did not think that he would be proud of being a miscegene.

I did not think it was quite English to be so impolite, but it made me realise that it took all sorts of people to make the world, including proud miscegenes and impolite Britons. England, too, has miscegenes of a wide variety dating back to the Roman conquest. You can detect in English features strains from many parts of the world. How many Adams, traced by anthropologists, are now in vogue I do not know. But in those days the Four Adams theory was not out of date: they were supposed to be the ancestors of the four main varieties – White, Red, Yellow and Black! Now they talk of *Homo sapiens*, Piltown Man and so on. *Homo sapiens* must have sprung out of many brands of wise apes who, all over the world, emerged more or less at the same time like tulips in the season. He has gone on multiplying in different environments with characteristics shaped by the particular surroundings, without shedding his ancestral traits of troglodyte days. But *Homo sapiens* is still an infant of half-a-million years, if that, and he must be excused for his infantile, ape-like ways. The elder races of the world like to think that, although outdistanced in material progress by the younger and more vigorous generations of the west, they are mellow. Or have they become anaemic? In any case, so long as the so-called 'civilised' world does not settle down to less destructive ways, it is only natural that the older races of the east should hover between Western materialism and Eastern spirituality, and remain a cross between the two--as a kind of mental miscegenes.

Towards the close of 1910 Chatto--or rather Binnie as some of us called him, after his first name of Virendranath pronounced with a 'B' in Bengali fashion--wrote to say that he had included me in the list of Indian delegates to the Egyptian National Congress which was going to be held in Paris, and that I should go there. The only contact I had so far had with anybody connected with the Egyptian national movement was at a public meeting at Caxton Hall where His Excellency Farid Bey was the principal speaker. I was suddenly asked by some fellow students, who were connected with the organisers of the meeting, to read Farid Bey's speech in English. He

had written it out in French, and an Englishman had translated it for him. It was, however, decided that a non-European should read it, and I was selected because, in the flattering words of my friends, I had a 'good delivery, and a suitable voice'.

Abbas Hilmi, Egypt's Khediv of the day, was a strange politician. He secretly sympathised with and encouraged the nationalists, but his government carried on a policy of repression. He hated Kitchener, the British proconsul, for he felt slighted and humiliated by him. On one occasion Hilmi wanted to arrange for Kitchener's assassination with the help of Indian revolutionaries. He was, however, rightly told that they were not mercenary assassins. Abbas Hilmi had a secret interview with Chatto in a specially engaged room in one of the fashionable cafes of Paris, and paid 200 francs for the privacy of the room for a couple of hours. Chatto was polite but ruthlessly critical and told him quite frankly that in spite of his professions of nationalism his treatment of the nationalists was insupportable.

Since no nationalist congress could meet in Cairo, it was called in Paris. But even the French Government was influenced, and orders banning the meeting were issued after the delegates had assembled. We learnt this on the eve of the conference, when we went to attend a reception by the president elect. We were informed that the organisers had made impromptu arrangements for the Congress to be held in Brussels, and all the delegates would travel to the Belgian capital as guests of the organisers. The Egyptian nationalists had long purses and money was no consideration. The arrangements were on a lavish scale. Egyptians had come from England, Germany, Italy, Russia and Switzerland besides Egypt. The Indian participants included Har Dayal, Chatto, Madam Cama, V.V.S. Aiyer, the two Naoroji girls -- Goshi and Perin -- and myself. Har Dayal had not only got over his anti-Muslim propensities but was at this time passionately pro-Egyptian and was actually the most energetic of the organisers of the Congress. He had formed very close relations with Al-Lutfi Goma and Al-Alaily. The former was a gifted person, speaking several languages with fluency like Har Dayal himself. Goma was an advocate, and had an Italian wife. Al-Alaily was a rich Egyptian young man in some way connected with the Khedive's court, and was the secretary of the Congress. His English speech--a good-sized pamphlet--was largely Har Dayal's handiwork.

Among the other notables who attended the Congress were Ali Kamil, Mustafa Kamal's brother, a fine orator in Arabic; Keir Hardie; and Mrs. Despard, a fiery Irishwoman in her seventies or eighties. She was heard with attention and respect. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, the English poet and friend of the Arabs, who was a passionate advocate of the Egyptian cause, excused himself but sent a fine message.

The Congress was, to my mind, a stimulating gathering but little more. Resolutions and sympathies do not go far in life unless they find expression in earnest action. Dr. Mansoor Rifat, an Egyptian nationalist, was not content with resolutions and started a revolutionary periodical from Paris called *Al Qisas* ('The Revenge') in Arabic and English. I contributed a few articles.

The cleavage between Indian nationalists and the loyalists and separatists among Muslims had its repercussions in England. Muslim students in London by and large kept aloof from the Home Rule for India Society founded by Shyamji Krishna Varma. Dhananjay Keer in his biography of Savarkar quotes from a letter by Ziauddin Ahmed, then in Germany, warning Abdullah Suhrawardy against his association as a Vice President with the Indian Home Rule Society: "Do you really believe that the Mohammedans will be profited if Home Rule be granted to India?" Asaf Ali writes:

The Muslim residents in London under 'Mushir Hosain and others organised a branch of the Muslim League. It was called the London Muslim League and was virtually a close preserve of Syed Amir Ali who was its president. Old boys of Aligarh generally supplied its secretary. It was a strictly constitutional body and, as such, never went beyond 'safe politics'. Even Ali Imam, who visited London in 1910, was too advanced for the London League. Dr. M.A. Ansari, who was a progressive, therefore presided over a public meeting which Ali Imam addressed.

I was elected Vice President of the Indian student.' London Majlis, of which B.C. Pal was president, in 1910. Pal seldom attended, and I therefore presided on many occasions. Among the speakers who used to participate, several afterwards became prominent in public life. Saklatwala went to the British parliament; Manu Subedar is a well known economist and industrialist; and Jamnadas Mehta and Raghavendra Rao are prominent figures in Indian politics. The London Majlis brought out a short-lived weekly, *The Indian Student*, edited by B.C. Pal, to which I contributed some articles.

I was called to the Bar in January 1912, and so was Rauf. It was a red letter day. With what pride I had ordered my wig and gown, and with what elation I 'sat' for my photograph. Although by tradition we should have drunk ourselves to stupefaction on the call night, since I was a teetotaler none of my friends drank more than just enough to 'drown' the sorrow of saying good-bye.

Rauf and I decided to return via the continent, but as my itinerary included Lucerne in Switzerland and he desired to go to Germany, where I had been before, we decided to travel separately and meet in Cairo. I shall never cease regretting that decision, for it had adverse results for Rauf's health which brought about his premature death. I could not prevent the ailment which assailed him, but being with him I may have been able to secure

medical treatment in time and thereby arrest the ravages that the illness brought about.

I went to Paris to say goodbye to friends, and from there to Lucerne. I noticed that Geneva, which I had seen, was repeated at Lucerne except for the hill opposite. And a trip to the top, with the railway train dragging you up the hillside like a huge donkey with a load on its sagging back, was a remarkable experience. The peak lay wrapped in snow and overlooked the town and the lake. From Lucerne I crossed over to Vienna. The journey through the Arlberg Valley is one of the most memorable I have ever undertaken. League upon league of hill and valley, it was just one colossal landscape covered with snow. To find nothing but unspotted whiteness as far as eye could see was like finding perfection on earth.

Towards the close of day I saw a sunset which shall never fade from my memory. The sun was a flaming tulip which had freely burgeoned on the invisible stalk of eternity, laughing with its ruby eye in the face of infinity. The sinewy Inn threaded its serpentine way over a valley asleep in the lap of snow. And then the light began to fade, also like a tulip that has had its day's fill of glory. I thought of Francis Thompson's Ode to the Setting Sun, and faintly understood how poets can glimpse the deeper significance of nature's moods.

After a brief stay in Vienna I took the train for Constantinople, the historic city known earlier as Byzantium and later renamed Istanbul. The Orient Express puffed its way into the night-cloaked fields of the East. The next morning, Bulgaria uncovered to my eyes the approaches to the East. In fact, Bulgaria was East. The landscape, the dress of the peasants, bulls instead of horses drawing carts resembling those I knew in India, everything seemed to signify that I had left Europe behind. I had heard so much about Constantinople and of Sultan-e-Rum in my childhood, and so many dreams had been woven round its glorious past, that I was fearful of finding the reality disappointing. While I was occupied with these thoughts and was rehearsing Turkish history in my mind, thinking of the days when the Turks thundered at the gates of Vienna and ruled over the territory I had traversed, the train passed through the suburbs of the city with their squalid, poverty-breathing hovels and narrow lanes. I was not prepared, even so, for the dismal sight of Hyderpasha, the terminus where I alighted. Everyone wore a red fez (or tarboosh as the Turks called it), and one saw many handsome faces but poverty was writ large. It pained me.

An Indian friend received me, and we drove to the Pera Palace Hotel in the European quarter. Women (except foreigners--mostly Greeks or Jews) went about cloaked in a black burka from head to foot, the richer women wearing also long veils, white or blue. I bought a tarboosh, which I was to wear after some years when the Khilafat movement began. My Indian



friend introduced me to Tewfiq Bey, editor of a Persian periodical and later a Deputy. He was most kind, and spared much time to accompany me to various places. He invited me to dinner at a Turkish restaurant in Pera where he pointed out Ahmed Riza Bey, president of the progressive Young Turks, dining with some friends. We went to see St. Sophia, the church which had been turned into a mosque. The old mural paintings had been replaced by huge tablets bearing the names Allah, Muhammad and the four Caliphs--Abu Bakr, Omar, Osman and Ali. There were some fine carpets laid out for congregational service, and near the entrance was a wooden and painted structure meant for the muezzin. Somehow I could not think of the place as a mosque. I tried to reconstruct in my imagination its former condition as one of the finest churches, perhaps the finest, of Christendom.

Then Tewfiq Bey was kind enough to take me to the Aya Aiyubia mosque, a little jewel on the shore of the Bosphorus where Sultan Muhammad V was to say his Friday prayers. The site marks the burial place of Aiyub, one of the companions of the Prophet, who died there during the earliest expedition against the Byzantine emperor of the time. It was a cold January day, and we had to stand and wait in the slushy compound of the mosque. Policemen in small boats guarded the approaches from the sea, and all the way from the Sultan's palace to the mosque was lined with Turkish troops. A band consisting of the sons of nobles and Pashas stood ready before the entrance to the mosque to strike up the national anthem on the arrival of the Caliph. I found the bitter cold of Constantinople more severe than the London weather of the time. My hands in fur gloves, and socked and shod feet, were completely benumbed, and seemed to be alien to my body except for the pain with which the freezing cold had afflicted them.

The Sultan arrived in an open phaeton drawn by four horses with outriders. He looked a fat, somewhat bent old man with a pointed white beard, in every respect an European except for his tarboosh. The band struck up, the guard presented arms, the prime minister helped the Sultan to alight, and the little procession made its way to the mosque. It was an impressive scene. I confess that all the emotions nurtured by my early upbringing in a Muslim home, and all the sentiments associated with this last vestige of Muslim freedom and greatness, welled up in me--in spite of my rationalism--and my eyes were moist when the strains of the anthem rose and floated away.

At one of the royal palaces overlooking the sea were the unique treasures and insignia of the Khilafat--not open to the public. Tewfiq astonished me by an ultra-rational remark. Preserved in the palace was the copy of the Qoran over which Osman was assassinated, and it was stained with the third Caliph's blood. Tewfiq said that if some Americans offered a big enough price to enable the Turks to acquire a battleship, they would not

mind its going to America. Turks thought in terms of the life and death of their nation so intensely even in 1912. When I expressed my surprise at Constantinople's backwardness, Tewfiq said: "But think of what we have gone through. For five hundred years they have not allowed us to sheath our sword and turn our attention to problems of peace. It is a surprise that we have kept our heads above water." There was a bitter earnestness in his voice which silenced me.

The next day I visited the covered bazar and watched Turks sitting round marble-topped tables, sipping coffee and smoking the narghile (hookha), their favourite pastime. The native costume of the Turkish men resembled that of the Afghans, with their embroidered waist-coats and a sash for belt. I had a passing feeling, based on earlier associations and sentiments now roused, that I might make Turkey my home. Tewfiq Bey encouraged the idea, and said: "We shall be glad to have you here. We need young men of ability. You can marry here and settle down. We can find you a wife from a good family. You can see her, but cannot woo in the European fashion. You will be invited to a house, and the eligible will come into the drawing room, offer you coffee, and play the piano for you, and you can make up your mind." We joked about it, and I thanked him.

Once when I was at school I had wanted to learn Turkish, and memorised a few words out of a 'self-teacher'. I tried them out on Tewfiq and discovered that, for aught he knew, I may have got hold of some Tibetan terms. But after a while he recognised a remote kinship between my words and their Turkish originals.

The day finally arrived for me to embark for Alexandria, and I boarded a Russian boat. On the way, we went ashore at Piraeus, the port for Athens. This corner of Europe was temperate even in January. Nature, I thought, had helped to mould the aesthetic and contemplative mind of the ancient Greeks. Equable climate and the bounty of the earth's gifts must have combined to promote Greek thought, imagination and achievement. Could the Greek philosophers and dramatists have been what they were in a climate which claimed the greater part of energy for purposes other than thought and imagination?

I had seen the awe-inspiring grandeur of ancient Rome a year before. The ruins of the Colosseum were enough to give an idea of the vaulting ambition of Rome. But what I now saw in the ruins of the Acropolis made me feel that Rome was but a magnified copy which did not quite capture the beauty of soul of the original. A crowd of historical memories rushed into my mind as I stood on the steps of the ruined Parthenon and surveyed the landscape around. I saw in my imagination the armies of Cyrus and the armies of Xerxes arrayed against the ancient Greeks, the Athenians and their allies. The ages of Homer and Sappho, Aeschylus and Aristophanes, Plato and Aristotle came to my mind. Coming down the steps

of the Parthenon, the guide pointed out the prison cell where Socrates breathed his last, discoursing on death. Unfortunately we had exhausted our time, and could not go in. I felt sorry, because I did long to pay the tribute of a pilgrim of life to the spot from where departed one of the noblest souls that ever visited this planet. The death of Socrates was like the movement of a symphony to its culmination.

The next halt during Asaf Ali's voyage back to India in 1912 was at Cairo. During the week that he spent there, he came across evidence of nationalist feeling both against Britain and Turkey. Asaf Ali writes about his impressions of the city:

Tewfiq had given me a letter of introduction to Saiyid Ali Moosvi, an Indian gentleman from Hyderabad who had been in Cairo for 20 years and who spoke Urdu with some difficulty. He was of great help and took me round the city. Of the old Egyptian acquaintances Lutfi Goma was the only one whom I unearthed. He was practising law, and took me to an Egyptian criminal court to see him conduct a case.

Cairo was a curious mixture of the West and the East. One saw Egyptian ladies of rank driving in four-wheelers in sable burkas, with long white veils which did not hide their faces – light-complexioned, attractive faces in most cases. A visit to one of the fashionable cafes astonished me. I had seen nothing like it in Europe, not even in Paris. Handsome, tall, Venus-like waitresses dressed in velvet gowns, with a suggestion of trailing trains, moved about and took down orders. Many of them, I was told, were Greeks or Italians. They brought their own drinks with them, and sat down to chat and coquette with the customers. I was shocked but Moosvi said it was not held objectionable, and those who were enjoying themselves thus were among the richest Egyptians. They gave gold coins as tips. I wondered where the Egyptians got the money from. "Cotton and sugar", Moosvi said. It struck me that Egypt was rich, and going the way of the rich. But I saw urbanised fellahin in the next cafe, which had cheap chairs with metallic legs and seats and small marble-top tables. Some sat there drinking wine, others sipping coffee and smoking narghile, and listening to Arabic music rendered on the stage by two women singers to the accompaniment of qanun, a rectangular stringed instrument. It was a proletarian show, but though the place was poor in appearance it was free from the vulgarity of opulence and unblushing exhibition of purchaseable passion.

I found that the Egyptian nationalists hated the Turks and held them in contempt. "They are good as soldiers but have no brains", the Egyptians would say, and would ask what contribution the Turks had made to literature and the arts. I thought it was the bitterness of their past subjection to the Turks that was responsible for the harsh judgment. The Tripolitan war launched by Italy was on. The Egyptians seemed to sympathise with

the Tripolitans--and even the Turks on religious grounds--and were hostile to Italy, but were not prepared to help Turkey in any material way. Turkey's once vast empire was crumbling. Had the Turks put Tripoli, Egypt, Arabia and the Balkans on their own legs, retaining no more than a federal link with them, a system of collective security might have been built up against the 'concert of Europe' of the 19th century. But the statesmanship of the Turks did not match their military prowess. During my stay in Cairo I tried to locate Rauf. But my inquiries about him drew a blank.

## A Delhi Interlude

When Asaf Ali left Athens for Cairo he thought it was his goodbye to Europe. But the lure of the West had not quite abated, and he was to return soon for a second, shorter spell.

Young Asaf Ali had become used to the material amenities and life style of European civilisation, and he missed them sorely on his return to India in 1912. He felt alienated from several of the customs and manners of his people. The unconscious integration with the physical and social environment which prevailed during his childhood and student years in Delhi had given place, after his transplantation in foreign soil for nearly three years, to conscious disintegration. He was to achieve conscious reintegration only after a couple of years, on his final return to India at the close of 1914, when the lure of England had spent itself.

Asaf Ali describes in the autobiographical notes the discomfort he felt during the Indian interlude of about a year before he went back to England:

When the Peninsular and Oriental's SS 'Persia' (since gone to the bottom of the sea during the First World War) touched Bombay, I was received at Ballard Pier by M.K. Azad. He was an elder of our London group, being of an earlier batch, and was now in legal practice at Bombay.

Much that I saw in Bombay, from the moment of my landing, undermined my expected happiness at home-coming. Bombay had not changed, but I had. At the pier itself, the labourers, coachmen and others whom I saw looked half clad in miscellaneous ways, with a loud lack of uniformity. I was disgusted by their habit of frequently spitting red saliva from lips stained with *pan* (leaf of the betel with lime and areca-nut parings).

One of the first things I asked Azad was when Rauf had passed Bombay. "Rauf has not come back yet", he said. This was surprising since he should have arrived a week earlier, and I began to feel worried. Perhaps Rauf could not meet Azad for some reason, and had proceeded to Delhi.

Azad took me to Santa Cruz where he lived in a shack by the sea-side, and I met his wife who was a perfect hostess. After wires had been sent to Delhi, announcing my arrival, Azad insisted that I must look up certain

persons I had known in England. Among them was Fazalbai, now an affluent business man at whose office we also saw his father, the old baronet Currimbhoy. In a little while, in barged a tall and well-built, smiling and garrulous person who had a word and a joke for everyone. He was introduced as Mr. Shaukat Ali – to which he himself added, "elder brother of Mohammad Ali Oxon". After giving me a friendly handshake he picked up my visiting card from Fazalbai's table and said with a highly pleased smile: "I am glad you have Muhammad written in full, and not a mere M. with your name" – and with a wink at Azad – "unlike these anglicised sahibs who put initials like M.K. before their names."

I passed the next day in Azad's company till the time came for me to board the train to Delhi. The sights and sounds at Victoria Terminus jarred on me. On seeing a hawker who was selling pillows and cushions, I realised that I had no bedding and I had to pass the whole night and the following day on the train. The cushions and pillows were loud with riotously flowered chints, and I hesitated. But Azad advised me to suppress my aesthetic aversion in favour of a night's comfort. I bought a cushion for a rupee. The train was suffocating, and the railway station's odours unpleasant. At last the guard whistled, waved the green flag, and the long train lurched forward. I have no memories of the journey except a sense of disappointment on reaching Agra where, I was perfectly sure, Rauf would meet me. Was it then true that he had not come back yet? When the train pulled into Delhi, I noticed a biggish welcoming crowd among whom I caught sight of some of my relations. I saw Rauf's father, but not Rauf. My maternal uncle embraced me with tears in his eyes, and Rauf's father came up, embraced me and asked why Rauf was not with me. My anxiety deepened when I learnt that there had been no letter from Rauf for three weeks. Noticing that I was plunged into a state of mind which chilled everyone around, my uncle said: "Your mother, aunts and grandmother are eagerly waiting for you at home. Let us start, and we can discuss it there." As we made our way in the horse-drawn wagon, everything around looked squalid. The road was unswept and dusty, not tarred like the Bombay roads. As we turned into the mohalla where my house was, the carriage passed under paper buntings and festoons of many colours with which my people had overhung the whole length of the street. As we passed on, neighbours – most of them poor people, not known to me – who were going about would stop and stare at me, or lift their right hand with the salutation 'Peace be on you' or just 'Peace'. The outer walls of our house had been white-washed in honour of my return.

The moment I set foot inside I was lost in the crowd of women relations and their friends. The first to greet me on the steps of the inner door were my aunts, whose hands were lifted to my head, and then over their own, in token of taking off the evils that might hang there – an old custom. Then

my maternal grandmother spoke from behind, "For heaven's sake let his mother reach him." Though my mother advanced towards me in her own calm and regal dignity, the moment her raised fingers touched my head and the words *tumhen allah ki aman* (God be your protector) escaped her lips, her pent-in emotion welled out, her voice faltered and became husky, and hot tears wetted my face as she kissed me. And then while embracing me as she used to when I was a child, holding me entirely in her arms, she nearly fainted and had to be held and supported. Finally I emerged from the throng of relatives and sat on the white-sheeted floor against a huge bolster, with my mother by my side and surrounded by others, in the *dalan* (big hall). I refused the solitary chair they had placed there for me.

It was remarked with surprise and approval that I had not forgotten my mother tongue, nor the subtle Delhi idiom and the delicate shades of Delhi pronunciation of Urdu. As for myself, I was in a confused state. Though happy beyond words to meet my mother and favourite relations, I did not like their incongruous and gaudy dresses, the unrestrained expression of emotion, and loud talk. The exile had returned to his country only to find himself a spiritual alien among his people and in the midst of the scenes of his childhood and early life.

There was excitement in the house, with a multiplicity of confusing orders to servants (some temporarily engaged for the occasion), comings in and goings out of neighbours, and the clamour of beggar women. Somebody wanted my mother's directions about distribution of the meat of the goat that had been sacrificed, others about the quantity of food to be prepared for the guests. Meanwhile came the *domnis* (professional women singers and their orchestral accompanists) who visit Indian homes on all festive occasions. They were tuning their instruments and preparing to sing welcome. Then one of my aunts came with a vessel full of mustard oil, and a trayful of black pulses, and handed me coins to drop into the oil after looking at the reflection of my face in it (this was part of a ceremony to ward off evil). The sweeperwoman of the house waited to receive all this as a gift, loudly repeating prayers for my long life and prosperity. Somebody was preparing *pan* to be offered to all present. I too was offered one. I excused myself. My nerves were giving way, and I suddenly begged my mother to shut off the musicians and to cut short the ceremonies. I fear this shocked everyone and confirmed their fear that I had become a foreigner in spirit. There was a murmur all round, but my mother saw my point and I was allowed to go upstairs to my newly prepared quarters – a study-sitting room and bedroom.

I felt like a shower, but there was only the old bath with a metal tub, and it was downstairs so that I would have to go through the courtyard, with the throng of guests watching. There was nothing odd about this in our Indian way of life in those days, but I was overcome by irritation. My first

impulse was to rent a *kotli* – one of the houses built to suit the Europeans, or anglicised Indians, in the Civil Lines outside the city wall. I did go about house-hunting, but found none to suit my purse, now nearly empty. I would have to start working soon.

I called on Ismail Khan, Barrister and Public Prosecutor of Delhi, and Mr. Kirkpatrick, president of the Bar Association. I was kindly received, and advised to get enrolled as an advocate of the Lahore Chief Court before beginning to practise in Delhi. Ismail Khan took me to the Bar Association, where he introduced me to the members. There were only six Barristers including Ismail Khan and Kirkpatrick, and the rest – about sixty – were pleaders with Indian qualifications. They were jealous of and irritatingly sneering towards the 'England-returned'. I soon found out why. While the drafting of complaints did not bother me, I was perfectly blank about practical procedure. It was this ignorance of Indian law and court procedure on the part of fresher barristers, and the irony of the most junior of barristers being senior to the most experienced and able among lawyers of Indian qualifications, which had created the atmosphere of hostility. The Bar Room itself was poorly furnished and had a depressing atmosphere. What a contrast to the Lincoln's Inn Common Room!

When I proceeded to Lahore to get myself enrolled as an advocate, Mian (Sir) Mohammad Shafi sponsored my enrolment. I handed my papers to the Registrar, an Englishman of the I.C.S. The old Chief Judge, Sir Charles Reid, saw me in his chamber and offered good advice. He talked of Lincoln's Inn in a reminiscent strain.

Within a few weeks of my return in 1912, my aunt who was the only surviving sister of my mother died of septicaemia. It was the second death in the family since my departure for England (my youngest and favourite aunt, who had been my playmate, having died when I was away.) For the first time, now, I saw what death meant. Two days before her end, my aunt was declared well enough to sit up in her bed for a while. As I came near her, her weak and trembling hands went up to her head in the familiar way betokening her loving readiness to sacrifice her life for me by taking over on herself the evils overhanging me. She could hardly speak. Our family physician and friend Hakim Ajmal Khan suggested a consultation with Dr. Ansari, who had just returned from England to settle down in Delhi. I called on him and explained my purpose, and incidentally mentioned that I had seen him preside over a meeting in Caxton Hall at which Ali Imam had spoken. He came with me to see my aunt, but it was too late. She had sunk into a deep coma.

The crisis was reached the next morning. When I went down to see her she was breathing with difficulty. My mother, with tears running down, was standing at the head of the bedstead that was surrounded by sobbing relatives, intoning verses from the Qoran in a voice trembling with

emotion. I saw my aunt's arms suddenly slide down on both sides and rest limp on the bed. Her breathing stopped. My mother's voice rose to a stifled shriek. Then she put her hands over my aunt's eyes, and pressing the lids down to close them, cautioned everyone not to cry aloud lest the departing life should be shocked back and the agony prolonged. I observed all this, my heart swelling with grief, but kept deliberately still. Later, when I could not stand there without breaking down, I retired to my room where my restraints gave way.

Later in the day I was helping my uncle to let her in the grave. It was the first time I saw a grave dug out and made ready to receive its tenant for eternity. It was a cold embrace that they had forced open, in earth's unresponsive side, for one who had been dear to me. Borne in upon me were the mystery of life and the stark reality of its termination beyond recall. On my return to the house, the dust of the grave into which I had descended to lay my aunt's body clung to my silk socks, and reminded me that the living must dissociate themselves from the inevitable element until it claims them finally. Life and dust are incompatible. It is when life is surrendered to its mysterious source that dust must return to dust.

It was about this time that Rauf returned, on crutches. I could not believe my eyes. He had left England full of bubbling health and assured of a brilliant career not only in law but in letters; he wrote English and Urdu with skill and brilliant humour. And now, within eight weeks, I saw him reduced to the plight of an invalid. A malady infected him while in Europe, and as he had not sought treatment immediately it took him months to recover, and even so not completely. To me Rauf was my second self, and this was a cruel blow. It was some consolation that he was able after some time to set up legal practice and do well in the profession.

After the introduction in connection with my aunt's illness, Ansari and I began to cultivate each other, for both of us felt lonely. A few others joined our group, and now Rauf as a friend-patient. There was no club other than the white man's, to which Indians were not admitted. We had heard of white wives of Indians being allowed in certain places, but not their husbands. Eventually, K.C. Roy the journalist and some others established the Orient Club to which no white man was to be admitted as a member. All of us joined the Orient. But in the beginning it was either Ansari's or my house, and often Ansari's office, that was the rendezvous for our small circle. Ansari had brought with him a new professional atmosphere, and ethics. He was the first to introduce in Delhi consulting practice and high fees, and to refuse to maintain a dispensary. He was a master of surgery, too, and had his own operation theatre. His qualifications were superior to the then Civil Surgeon of Delhi, belonging to the Indian Medical Service, who was taken aback to see an Indian in private practice charging the highest fee which had hitherto been his prerogative.



One day a smart gentleman in morning coat, striped pants, white spats and a skyblue hat walked up to my bachelor quarter of the house. (A stairway led directly to it from the *deohri* or outer entrance, so that it was altogether separate from the zenana or women's part of the house.) Looking about ten years older than myself, he was well built and his expressive eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles radiated goodwill and cheer. He said he was Mohammad Ali, generally known as Mohammad Ali Oxon. Offering his big hand for a handshake, he added: "As I am hoping to be your neighbour, I have thought it proper to call on you." And then followed a series of questions, and autobiographical information imparted with easy geniality. He had graduated from Oxford and then tried and failed in competition for the I.C.S. A year and half ago he had thrown up a promising career in the civil service of Baroda State to embark on journalism and public life, and launched an English weekly, *The Comrade*, in Calcutta. I knew all this, for the first few issues of the journal had reached some of the students in Lincoln's Inn. In fact Mohammad Ali's fame as a writer of English had spread even earlier. I remembered how, when I was in the final class of my school, some of my teachers recommended a study of his English style.

It took Mohammad Ali some weeks to set up the press for printing his journal which was now to be brought out from Delhi, and to furnish his residence. Both were within a very short distance from my home. During this period he divided his time between supervising the work in the neighbouring premises, and virtually staying with me. Ansari and our little circle were delighted with Mohammad Ali's addition. But his circle was much wider. Among his friends were members of the Imperial Council, Hindu and Muslim, other public men and journalists, and senior officials like Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson (Finance Member in the Viceroy's Council) and Sir Charles Cleveland. It was Cleveland, head of the Intelligence Department, who lent Mohammad Ali a smuggled copy of Savarkar's book which had been intercepted by Customs. At least once a week we of Ansari's circle would dine together, and on some of these occasions listened to music by professional Qawwal singers – an item of entertainment introduced by Mohammad Ali.

One day Shaukat Ali also turned up, bubbling with geniality. And in his big-brother manner he said: "I suspect all of you fellows just hanker and hunger after Europe", and with a meaningful inclination of his massive but handsome head, "I know why, I know why." After a laugh all round, he proceeded: "But I must tell you as I have told Mohammad, that you must build up and organise your own social life. Build your own clubs, and organise your own society – and above all be true to Islam." Both the brothers loved good Indian food, and a cigar afterwards. They would decline *pan* when smoking their cigar, and repeat the Islamic injunction:

"No marriage with two sisters at the same time." After the cigar, *pan*; the two could not be enjoyed together. The brothers made delightful company, each capping the other's jokes or even smutty stories.

There was a little flutter in our group when E.M. Forster arrived in Delhi in the course of stocking his mind with materials for 'A Passage to India'. He was a friend of Ross (Sir Ross) Masood, and was known to Ansari. Masood decided that the music of Delhi's professional singers should be part of the experiences that Forster was amassing. I was suddenly informed by Ansari that I was to arrange a performance in my bachelor's digs in the Kucha Chelan house, because it was not possible to have it in 'Bahisht' ('Paradise'), his own house. It was the peak of summer, and the performance took place under the stars on my terrace. All of us squatted on the floor, for the most part in obvious discomfort. I was on pins and needles. The singer was not the best, the notice being very short, and I was painfully conscious that the singing would in any case only confuse a westerner listening to Indian music for the first time. I said something by way of assuring Forster that I sympathised with him in his ordeal, and his regard for truth did not allow him to disguise the fact that he found the music incomprehensible.

Music, to my mind, represents the essence of a people's outlook on life, their whole mental inclination and approach to the invisible. Music therefore brings out the essential differences between peoples. India like Europe is populated by a variety of races and is no less rich in principal languages. But just as Western music is essentially identical throughout Europe, Indian music is essentially the same throughout India. It is a language which no Indian can fail to understand. Just as an Italian can speak to a Norwegian in music – irrespective of the words – a north Indian can lay bare his soul to a Sindhi or a southerner in song. This is not possible between westerners and Indians.

The weather was becoming unbearable. The khus-khus curtains and punkha began to fail, and I thought of Simla. I had never been to an Indian hill station. The trip by railway was an exhilarating experience, and the mountain scenery a most welcome stimulant to the spirit. A distant cousin of my paternal grandmother was the Deputy Postmaster of Simla. He received me, and his first observation – which showed how others saw me – at once irritated and humbled me. It is surprising how we remain, much of the time, in a state of delusion about our physical exterior. Unless you see yourself in a big mirror alongside others of different stature, you remain ignorant about your own proportions. My Simla relation was a big, tallish man himself and said: "Your father was bigger and taller than me, and I expected to see you taller and bigger. But you are so small." This was bluntly uncomplimentary. But he enjoyed the privilege of age, and this was his way of expressing affectionate intimacy.

I chose a modest hotel just above the railway station. There were some Indians as well as English people staying there. As chance would have it, I found a young lady – a charming Bengali girl, Maya Ray whom I had met in London. She eventually came to be the link that joined me and my wife some sixteen years after.

Maya introduced me to her mother, who had brought her to Simla to wean her from a romance of which she did not approve. (Maya eventually married a Calcutta barrister by name Bannerji, and subsequently married and then separated from my wife's uncle Nagendranath Gangulee, whose first wife was Tagore's only daughter Miradevi.) Maya and her mother had formed a group with Mr. and Mrs. Chaman Lal. At that time Law Minister of Patiala, Chaman Lal was a brother of Madanlal Dhingra, the revolutionary assassin of Curzon Wyllie. The family had in those days dropped the surname 'Dhingra'. Mrs. Chaman Lal was a granddaughter of Keshub Chandra Sen, the Brahmo Samaj leader, and she was one of the pioneers who led the way to inter-caste and inter-provincial marriage, rare in those days. I was invited to join their table, and soon became one of the group.

Picnics and outings were planned by the gracious ladies, who were full of social activities and gossip. I was schooled in the etiquette and tastes of the better type of anglicised Indian society. This appeared to be a good blend, into which Europeans could fit without difficulty. All spoke English and in all but the ladies' dress, and a preference for Indian cuisine, approximated to the western way of life. But their criticism of certain European ways was scathing: European pretension to cleanliness was superficial and did not include personal hygiene.

Mrs. Ray was anxious to find a suitable match for her daughter, and a tea party was arranged at Raja Sir Harnam Singh's. Kanwar (now Raja Sir) Maharaj Singh was the centre of attraction. The match-making party proved unsuccessful, much to the relief of Maya Ray who was in love with one who became her first husband. Our circle was reduced when the Rays left. A common friend who was there for the season thought that I would feel Maya's departure, for it was imagined that I had fallen in love with Maya. And by way of compensation she commended me to a young and beautiful married Englishwoman. But I was already quite friendly with this person. Indeed, she and I aroused much envy by pairing together much of the time, at the Rink especially for we made the best dancing and skating couple. More eyes were on the two of us in Simla than I could imagine. After a time Ansari wrote from Delhi: "You lucky dog! Who is this great beauty, whose fame has travelled here?"

When Asaf Ali returned to Delhi from Simla, there was a political ferment among leading Muslims. They were deeply concerned at the threat from the western powers to the Ottoman empire within which were located the Muslim

**holy places of Arabia.** There was a move to raise an Indian contingent for an international Muslim brigade for defending the holy places. This was comparable in its zeal transcending national frontiers to the Communist-led international brigade which went to Spain a quarter century later, to defend the republican regime from the counter-revolution of General Franco. An Indian medical unit led by Dr. Ansari actually went to the aid of Turkey. It was a precursor of the Indian medical mission of the nineteen-thirties to China, which was then under attack by Japan. Asaf Ali writes:

More than my professional work in the courts, what engaged my attention during the next four months in Delhi was the politics of the Balkan wars. The plight of the Turks had gripped the minds of the Mussalmans. Mohammad Ali's restless mind provided a release for their emotions. Shaukat Ali, too, had retired from government service and joined his brother. Both supported vigorously a scheme formulated by Mushir Hosain Qidwai for organising an international volunteer force for the Defence of Kaba. The scheme, shorn of its extravagances, was published by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in his Urdu weekly *Al-Hilal*. It was far and away the most popular paper among the Muslims. Shaukat Ali established his headquarters at Delhi and sponsored the Khuddam-i-Kaba movement. This was intended to enlist, train and finance volunteers for putting in a year or two of garrison duty in Mecca. They would be the Indian contingent of the proposed international force for guarding the holy places of Islam. It was a grandiose scheme. A more practical project was a medical mission to supplement Turkey's resources for meeting war needs. Mohammad Ali was able to make a good job of it because Ansari generously undertook to organise the medical unit. Indian Muslims contributed lavishly to the fund, and able young men of position and education came forward to join Ansari's unit.

It was at this time, towards the close of 1912, that I met Maulana Abul Kalam Azad for the first time. Neither he nor I have forgotten this meeting, though his prodigious memory has retained some details which have slipped from mine. Talking of it the other day here at Ahmadnagar, Maulana Azad reminded me of my dog, a fine retriever, and of a trip we made to Okhla. I cannot recall that now, but I remember seeing a slim, handsome person at Mohammad Ali's dinner table, sitting next to the host, with a head-wrap after the style of the Arabs and looking no older than myself (now, with his grey hair, he looks ten years older, though he is actually some months younger than me). He talked brilliantly and with confidence, though with what seemed to me at that time a touch of affectation but is really a habitual mannerism. Applying his mental powers, akin to genius, to an incredible store of learning, he sparkled and dazzled, and only Mohammad Ali, whose intellectual keenness was matched by witty volubility, could keep pace with him.

Delhi was agog at this time with preparations for the State entry of the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, into the new capital. A liberal-minded statesman, he had abolished the system of indenturing Indian labour for work in other British colonies. He also decided to annul the partition of Bengal, causing disappointment among a large section of Muslims. But the reversal of Curzon's decision was regarded by the Congress as a major triumph, and it drew fulsome praise at the Calcutta Congress session of 1911. The bomb attack on Lord Hardinge in Delhi in December 1912, while the viceregal procession was passing through Chandni Chowk, therefore evoked widespread condemnation. The Viceroy, who escaped with injuries kept cool and gave orders that the rest of the programme should not be abandoned. Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson read out Hardinge's speech.

The three-and-a-half months that Asaf Ali had spent in the cool heights of Simla, a British-built resort, in the company of anglicised or English men and women, were almost like being in England. Life in Delhi, on the other hand, was not quite satisfying. Asaf Ali was longing to get back to England. He writes:

Meanwhile England lay in my memory like a mountain of lodestone, drawing to itself my mind, like a piece of iron, across every physical obstacle over a distance of six thousand miles. Luck seemed to conspire to make things easy for me. A kind of a hopeless brief came to me for opinion, having reached its culmination in the Lahore Chief Court (now High Court). Could the defeated party afford the fees of a senior at the Privy Council, and the Court's costs? If so I would go and give instructions personally. The bargain was clinched, subject to the opinion of the lawyer in London.

This became my excuse for proceeding to England. My mother was unhappy. I assured her that the separation was for a short time. I was dreaming of practice at the Privy Council Bar, and intended to establish a home and send for her – a silly delusion, for it was sheer folly to expect that my mother would ever go to England. Rauf's robust commonsense and can did scepticism prophesied a safe and early return home, but at that high point of my enthusiasm it did not please me. Mohammad Ali, who had become quite intimate, while not probing into my Privy Council brief, poked much fun, according to his wont, at my quest after the English lady of Simla or other manifestation of the eternal woman.

In Bombay, M.K. Azad introduced me to Horniman and Omar Sobhani, his newly made friends. Both were delightful in their way. The next day I embarked, as chance would repeat it, on the very steamer which had taken me to England the first time. On the boat I got to know a leading citizen of Delhi, Pearey Lal (of Pearey Lal and Sons). He was to become a prominent helper of the nationalist movement in Delhi. Pearey Lal was about 16 years older than me but treated me as an equal, and a lifelong friendship was begun. He was a brilliant business man, who had begun

life with next to no capital – two rupees and eight annas, according to him – and now in 1913 he was on the way to becoming a millionaire. Luck played its part too. When a conveyance was needed for Hardinge after the bomb incident, Pearey Lal who happened to be nearby offered his car, a Ford tourer. The vehicle became a favourite in government circles. He was now thinking of extending his business, and was going to England and America for securing new agencies.

Another co-passenger was my old teacher at St. Stephen's, F.J. Western. We talked about poetry, and about Tagore who had appeared on the literary firmament like a new planet. Western had read parts of *Gitanjali* in manuscript when Andrews was passing it for its voyage to the west, to reach W.B. Yeats. The first thing I did on reaching Paris was to buy a copy of *Gitanjali*. Chatto had met me at the railway station and, though generally cynical, he was in transports of unalloyed admiration when we read some of the poems together at my hotel. When I recited the lines, "Diety of the ruined temple, the strings of Vina sing no more your praise, The bells in the evening proclaim not your time of worship, The air is still and silent about you", Chatto listened in silence and then, exploding in laughter, said: "You have missed your vocation, and the stage has lost an actor in you."

Chatto, whom I first met at old India House in 1909, is one of the rarest jewels I have known. A versatile linguist and poet, a mine of information on widely different subjects, he did not belong to the India House group but wrote fearlessly in defence of Madanlal Dhingra. He said in a letter to a London newspaper: "The catalogue of the coming assassinations will be a long one, the responsibility for which must rest at the British Government's door." That sentence of his earned him his expulsion from his Inn, and I hold to this day that but for that expulsion he would have come back to India as a barrister and would have been in the front rank of the country's lawyers and public men. That disbarring sealed his career as a wandering revolutionary who wasted his genius on fruitless pursuits. When his younger sister Sarojini Naidu joined the chorus of condemnation of Dhingra's action, Chatto swore one of his oaths and said, "She is my sister and proud of being a poet. By Jove, I can reel out that sort of poetry by the yard" – and burst into laughter.

Chatto was affectionate, brimming with humour, and moved by lofty idealism. But he was sentimental to a fault, and his amorous tangles were endless. He had left behind in London a fading beauty who, after having known happier times with a young peer, was now in straits but had captured his heart. He felt bound to support her. Then a law lord's niece, Catherine – an Irish girl and a Catholic – had married him. But they reached the point of incompatibility on the question of the religion of the children they might have. She stood for Catholicism, and he for

rationalism. And they were on the point of separation. Now another beauty, a domiciled German, was the rising passion of his life. Chatto was fascinating, with big speaking eyes, but not handsome by any means. It was his genius that drew others like a magnet, and antagonised those who feared rivalry.

I stayed in Paris for a week or so. Madam Cama, mother figure of the revolutionary party, invited me to Vichy where she had gone on medical advice. The widow of a wealthy solicitor, she was a woman of extraordinary courage and the centre of gravity round whom Har Dayal, Chatto and others moved. But the revolutionary party was now disintegrated and dispersed. Ayer had gone back to India and was in Pondicherry, Govind had shot himself after making and losing a fortune at a casino, and Har Dayal was in America. Only Rana was her constant colleague in Paris.

The journey to Vichy through the idyllic countryside was a delight. In Vichy itself there was an arcaded approach to the mineral-water hot springs where the patients suffering from gout or other ailments congregated, drank the prescribed quantity of water and walked about. It was not a pleasant spectacle. Madam Cama appeared to be galloping into senility. Tears sprang to her eyes every time she laughed or spoke of anything touching a sentimental chord in her. Madam Cama talked about Savarkar, whose younger brother had sent her extracts from one of Savarkar's letters from the Andamans. It was a beautiful letter, and in a way read like Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*. When I was asked, years later, to write a sketch of Savarkar's, I reproduced in my contribution as much of this letter as I could recollect.

### **At Sarojini's Court in London**

My return to London was like coming home. I went to the National Liberal Club the same evening and met Syud Hossain and other friends. In addition to the question of practice at the Privy Council Bar, my mind was exercised by an ambitious project I had been planning for some time: the publication of an Urdu literary magazine from London under the title *Taj*. I had already written poems for the first issue, and secured promises from Abdur Rahman Bijnori who was enthusiastic over the project, Syud Hossain, Shahid Suhrawardy, as well as from Rauf and others in India who were on my list of contributors. I had begun researching in the British Museum, collecting novelties like Anglo-Indian poets of Urdu and had listed a dozen of them, with selections. Estimates were invited from publishers. The technical difficulties being not a few, the minimum quotation was 250 pounds per issue. Since this was beyond my means, I tried to see if I could persuade a publisher to undertake the venture. I told the *Windsor Magazine's* management that I would take care of the editorial

side if they would meet the cost of the publication as their own. Finally I had to content myself with my own literary efforts: translation of some of Tagore's works into Urdu (some published, e.g. *Chitra*, *Crescent Moon* and some poems from *Gitanjali*, and, not yet published, *King of the Dark Chamber*.) I was greatly stimulated in my literary efforts by an event that followed – Sarojini Naidu's arrival in London. Perhaps I should say a word about my first meeting with her.

Among those I knew well and liked greatly in London was Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya ('Gunnu' to her friends), the younger sister of Chatto and of Sarojini. Gunnu was still in London, preparing to go to Girton College. It was she who first told me that 'Akka' (elder sister) was expected in England. The Chattopadhyayas are a gifted, charming, affectionate and in some ways amazing family. They make friends for life, but there is a kind of rivalry among themselves in several matters including friendships. With their friends they discuss their brothers and sisters with remarkable frankness. I was favoured with and respected these family confidences. Chatto was particularly fond of Gunnu, who was regarded the Nestor of the family – able, solid, steady, wise, tenderly affectionate and gentle. He was also fond of Harindranath (now a well-known poet) who was only nine or ten then but was already lipping in numbers. Akka was loved by both Chatto and Gunnu but was considered, at the time, a little too self-centred, a sort of Narcissus. Against this background, and Arthur Symmons's description in his introduction to *The Golden Threshold*, (Sarojini's first volume of poems) and Edmund Gosse's foreword to the second volume, I expected to see a wisp of a woman, given to dreamy silences and observant by side glances only.

I was full of excitement when Gunnu and I went together to meet Sarojini. She was staying with some English friends in the old house of George Eliot. It was soon after dusk, the blinds were down and the curtains drawn, and mellow light filled the drawing room when we entered it. "Hullo, Gunnu", came Akka's greeting. "This is Asaf bhai (brother) – Asaf Ali is the full name", Gunnu introduced me, and added: "He is a member of the family, a full-fledged Barrister, and a poet." Akka held out her hand, smiled a bewitching smile, and a cascade of words followed. I was a bit flustered, and said something to disclaim the last title by which I had been introduced. It was a sisterly exaggeration of some ability to versify. Akka wanted to hear some of my 'composions'. This was a family joke which immortalised a malapropism. Some fool had spoken of Sarojini's 'composions' (from 'compose', of course).

Sarojini falsified my mental picture of her in every single detail. She was a full-figured, picturesquely dressed, heavily bejewelled person, radiant and restless, full of sparkling life and laughter. Nobody would believe that she, so full of youthfulness, was the mother of four children, the eldest 13



or 14 at the time. Sarojini quoted your favourite poets for you in her lyrical voice and with a lilt and rhythm which sounded pleasant to the ear even if somewhat un-English. You mentioned Francis Thompson, for instance, and the floodgates of her prodigious memory were unlocked with "I fled him down the nights and down the days, I fled him down the arches of the years", or you said Swinburne, and she would go on with "In the beginning of years, There came to the making of man, Time with the gift of tears, And grief with a glass that ran." Sarojini appeared to me like a breathing anthology. Anecdotes and humorous stories devetailed into one another in a ceaseless stream of words. She was all life and light, vibrant and brilliant by the mere fact of being.

Sarojini, Syud and I soon became a trio who were almost everywhere together except when Sarojini, with her much wider and higher connections, was rocketed into what was to us like the stratosphere. But elsewhere, whether it was Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop, Poets' Club dinners, meetings at Oxford and Cambridge, or at the Lyceum where she stayed for a long time, we were almost invariably together. She was becoming a great centre of attraction, and held her durbar almost daily at the Lyceum.

Soon after Sarojini's arrival, Rabindranath Tagore was wafted into England with a halo of great fame following the Nobel Prize. British literary circles and newspapers, not accustomed to thawing easily, extended him an unusually warm welcome. Indians resident in London organised a reception at the Criterion. It was here that I was introduced to the poet, when most of the crowd was gone and only a small number of admirers remained. Sarojini took me to the great man, Christ-like in appearance, and said: "Here is a fellow poet, who has brought you an offering in verse." I had addressed him a sonnet which, to my gratification, had been accepted by the *Westminster Gazette* and was to appear in it the following day: "The soul communing with the world unseen, Reflects itself in poet saints immortal, To them is opened Heaven's secret portal, They see..."

A series of lectures by Tagore on 'Sadhana', his philosophy of life, was arranged. I regret to say they fell flat. Syud and I attended these lectures, admission to which was by highly priced tickets. Tagore's fascinating face and saintly appearance were a great asset. But his voice – shrill, pitched in a high key and almost metallic – was a disadvantage; it belied the gravity and calm of his personality. "Poetry and philosophy don't go together", I heard someone say at the end of the first lecture. An Englishman, who could only think of philosophy in terms familiar to him, said: "I confess I couldn't follow him. It is hardly philosophy as we understand it." Akka, too, thought that a poet should not stand forth as a philosopher, in prose. I defended Tagore, but the general opinion about 'Sadhana' did not help

to mark him out as a philosopher in the technical sense. I do not suppose he himself aspired to be an Aristotle or a Kant. He had a theory of life which he lived, and it was in no way different from the views of the sages of ancient India. (I remained Tagore's devoted admirer to the last, and wrote an elegy in Urdu when news of his death reached me in prison in 1941.)

When I conceived the idea of organising a gathering of literary personalities at a dinner for Sarojini, it was backed by Syud Hossain, Abdur Rahman and our little group. I got in touch with Robert Bridges, W.B. Yeats, Alice Meynell, Henry Nowbolt, Walter de la Mare, Edmund Gosse and others, to fix up the chair and the main toasts. Bridges, who had recently become the laureate, was too reserved to come out of his retreat. He wrote back to excuse himself. Now the choice lay between Alice Meynell and Yeats. In fact Yeats' name was suggested by Walter de la Mare. But Meynell was my favourite and I pestered her for acceptance. She was as sweet about it as her 'Renunciation' sonnet, but she did not have a speaking voice and would neither take the chair nor propose a toast but would regard it as a privilege to come to the dinner. Now I was at my wits' end. If Yeats too declined to preside, the function would be second-rate. So I wrote to Yeats in the spirit of one at bay. Luckily he consented. The rest was plain sailing. Including our Indian guests, covers were to be laid for more than 250. And now came the problem of problems, the settling of the table plan. As RSVPs kept pouring in, Syud and I were in a quandary. We had to see to it that incompatibles should not spoil the evening by being seated side by side or close opposite. One had to think of rank and position too. However I passed the proofs a few hours before the dinner, and left the rest to luck.

The function went off well, but Fleet Street disposed of it with the briefest notice. Perhaps this had to do with an incident at the dinner. The reporter of *The Times* had asked for the supply of more champagne for the Press corps. The matter was referred to me, and I told the management to comply but within limits. When I found the next morning how poorly repaid was my labour of love of so many weeks, I concluded that the Press representatives must have felt slighted and decided to show that they could write down as easily as write up. However, the flashlight photograph of the dinner, our table plan and menu with the toast list, and the letters and autographs of literary personalities of the day are among my treasure of mementos.

An unexpected and welcome addition to the list of guests at the dinner for Sarojini Naidu was Mohammad Ali. He and Syed Wazir Hasan arrived in London for voicing a protest on behalf of Indian Muslims. Part of a Calcutta mosque had been demolished by the Improvement Trust, after the usual proceedings, in order to straighten a road. An agitation followed,

and Mohammad Ali had plunged into it with his usual vigour. The Raja Sahab of Mahmoodabad helped him and Syed Wazir Hasan, then secretary of the Muslim League, to go to London and wait in deputation on the Secretary of State, Lord Crewe. I was shocked to see Mohammad Ali with a shaggy beard, but in spite of this hirsute badge of orthodoxy he had lost none of his gaiety and vivacity.

Jinnah had been in London for some time, and as he, Syud Hossain and I belonged to the National Liberal Club we met there frequently. Jinnah's reserve was not a thousandth part as freezing as it has now become. He was a stickler for principles, transparently honourable, and genial. With Sarojini Naidu he had an enviably close friendship. Mohammad Ali admitted Sarojini's gifts, but made fun of my high assessment of her. As for Jinnah, Mohammad Ali did not regard his intellectual attainments as anything special. Mohammad Ali was critical of Ameer Ali, too, having fallen foul of him over the question of the medical mission to Turkey. Ameer Ali had thought of such a step at about the same time as Mohammad Ali had helped to organise the Ansari mission, and there was a tussle over the credit for the idea. Since the visit to London by Mohammad Ali to agitate the Cawnpore mosque question came on top of the excitement engendered among Indian Muslims over the Balkan war, Ameer Ali, cautious to a fault, gave the cold shoulder to the deputation. Ameer Ali's London League used to receive a subvention from the All India Muslim League, and Mohammad Ali hinted at cessation of the grant. He even carried the controversy into the Press.

However, India Office closed its doors. Crewe would not agree to meet the Muslim deputation. This riled Mohammad Ali and roused him to passionate expression. The Aligarh Old Boys' Association organised a dinner in honour of Mohammad Ali and Wazir Hasan and secured Aubrey Herbert for the chair. Though Ameer Ali and the Aga Khan did not attend, a large number of persons prominent in British public life participated. They included John Dillon, the Irish patriot and M.P., H.G. Wells, and A.G. Gardiner of the erstwhile *Nation* which represented Leftist liberalism. Mohammad Ali gave expression in his speech to his pent-up feelings and burning zeal. Wazir Hasan was calm, collected and to the point. Mrs. Naidu spoke, and with effect as usual. She was becoming a star turn for oratorical performances, outside her special sphere of poetry and literature. Her talent for rhetorical and mellifluous speech was flowering in a way that must have surprised her as much as it astonished her audiences. It was opening up before her eyes new realms to conquer. After a few more such functions Mohammad Ali and Wazir Hasan returned to India.

Now Jinnah began to attract the younger generation. Mrs. Naidu – who had become a kind of sovereign with a large court to which students, in

addition to literary personages, flocked from London, Oxford and Cambridge – helped to build a circle of admirers round him. On one occasion she and I debated, in the company of Syud at a private dinner, the comparative merits of Mohamniad Ali and of Jinnah. My zealous advocacy on behalf of Mohammad Ali evoked Sarojini's retort, now proved true: "My Mohammad Ali will go further than your Mohammad Ali!"

Some senior students got together to revive the London Majlis. Jinnah was elected its first president, and Dr. Jivraj Mehta the first vice-president. The inaugural address was delivered by Gokhale, who happened to be in London at the time. He was ill, and had come to England for treatment and rest. I saw Gokhale and heard him on that occasion, for the first and last time. The address was good and temperate, as was to be expected. It had kept him awake for three nights – so he confessed to Sarojini, a favourite of his. With Jinnah he stood in the position of a guru, an elder statesman, friendship and association with whom was a matter of pride. Gokhale was Gandhi's guru too. How far the two disciples were to drift!

It was at one of the students' meetings at Oxford addressed by Sarojini that I gained a friendship which has been one of the brightest spots in my life. Mirza Hosain Ali Khan (now a high dinitary in the Nizam's Dominion) was then at Wadham College, and his cousin Aghoo (now Nawab Hasan Nawaz Jung of Hyderabad) was also in Oxford. These two took me to as if I were a long-lost brother. Hosain Ali is indubitably one of the ablest products of Oxford – balanced, soundly critical, with a flair for literature and an appreciative and sensitive intellect. One of Hosain Ali's boys, a handsome child, is my godson and bears my name. And Masuma, Hosain's wife, is one of my wife's closest friends today.

Sarojini was beginning to feel run down, and a fairly serious operation was in the offing. Eventually the time came for her to go under the knife. She went to a fashionable nursing home, where she received her countless friends. The nurses were on the verge of a breakdown, carrying flowers sent or brought by friends, guiding visitors, finding vases for flowers and looking after them no less than after their ungovernable patient. Sarojini's room looked like a florist's shop, and had a heavy cloud of scents.

One day as I went to see her I found old Sir Frederick Pollock waiting downstairs for his turn while some other visitor had gone up – only one could go up to her room at a time. I thought I could consult him about my plan to practice at the Privy Council Bar. Sir Frederick's erudition both forensic and literary was deep. He knew enough Persian to be able to quote from Jalaluddin Rumi at public gatherings. He had moved my call to the Bar, and I could count on it for starting this consultation with him. He was sympathetic, and thought that it would be a good thing for me to start as a junior to some first-rank lawyer practising at the Privy Council. But

when, with rising hope, I turned to him to recommend me to someone, he said: "I left the Bar a long time ago. I am so senior to the seniormost of them that I do not even know them." He did not say this out of a sense of superiority or want of kindness. It was literally true. Then he continued, in his quiet style: "It will be a good thing to have someone who can correct the spelling of Indian names in Privy Council records. They have no idea of Indian names." Sir Frederick had a passion for accuracy. In fact it was he who pointed out the incorrect spelling of my own name when I interviewed him in connection with my call. My name had been misspelt by some teacher in the primary school, and the error had persisted on account of the vicious doctrine of continuity of official records. But the moment Sir Frederick saw my name, he said: "Isn't it wrongly spelt? It should be Asaf and not Asif."

This was Sarojini's last day before the operation, and when my turn came I took up an armful of arum lilies for the ailing poet (Oxford would not have 'poetess'). The pretty nurse while admitting me to the room cautioned that the patient had too many visitors that day and doctor's instructions had been flouted to extinction. I was about to beat a retreat, but Sarojini said that a few minutes would not matter. She looked a little wistful and said something about the uncertainties of life. I thought it was a needless apprehension, with the most eminent of surgeons attending on her. Then we talked of various things, and the nurse, bringing in some more flowers, looked at me with the expression of a reminder. I rose to go. Akka said: "Well, Asaf, we don't know what may happen tomorrow, but as my little brother you have the right to kiss me goodbye." I bent in all solemnity and sentimental sadness towards her cheek, and said *au revoir*.

Sarojini went to King's Langley for convalescence in a charming nursing home run by Mrs. Archer (wife of the well-known critic William Archer). Syud and I went to look her up. It was typical English countryside, with an unmacadamised road, high hedgerows on either side, and colourful fields with poppies and corn stretching around for leagues. Mrs. Archer's nursing home was on a slight eminence, and the garden was quite big, with about a half-dozen chalets dotted over it for the convalescents' use. You could turn them to the sun like a revolving chair. Sarojini lay on a bed in one of these chalets. We stayed and chatted with her till tea time. Jinnah was among the subjects discussed – not the political but the social and personal Jinnah of those days. (He figures in a poem in Sarojini's *Broken Wing*, and I recall Rati Petit asking my opinion of this particular poem when Sarojini introduced me to her at Petit Hall in Bombay. The future Mrs. Jinnah apparently did not relish my remarks which were none too panegyric, as I learnt later from Mrs. Naidu. I did not know then that a romance was on, and that the poem had a special significance for Rati.)

Soon after her return to London, Sarojini resumed her activities. She became a member of the Poets' Club, and Syud and I would go with her as her guests to the Club's monthly dinner at the Monico in Shaftesbury Avenue, opposite Cupid's Statue. The three of us also sometimes visited the Poetry Bookshop where Harold Monroe arranged readings by living poets. The Bookshop was, to begin with, an unpretentious little place in Paternoster Row on the borderland of Poverty, far way from and utterly unlike bookshops and clubs of the West End. It was like a rebuke and reproach to the Poets' Club. The poets gave their readings in a room with a floor of bare boards which was reached by a wooden staircase and contained about 30 straight-back chairs. In front was a low, small dais and a stand on which the poet would place his book or MS, and a reading lamp was so arranged that its light fell only on the book and on the reader's face. There being no other lights, the audience sat in the umbra of the poet's reading lamp. It was Harold Monroe's idea that snobbery and poetry were inconsistent. It was an insult to the Muse, and to her classless devotees, to drag poets into the garish glare of Monico's chandeliers and sit down in stiff-front shirts and swallow-tail coats to relish poetry on a full stomach, as at a cabaret dance. Poetry Bookshop was a landmark and a cult, like the Left Book Club in a wider sphere later on. It was an attempt to rescue poetry from the clutches of the fashionable well-fed, and bring it to the people, as a gift of the gods to those who lacked much else.

When Harold Monroe invited Sarojini Naidu to give her reading, she graciously invited my suggestions. I listed my favourites, she had her own, and her recitation included both. Sturge Moore was sitting next to me. After the reading we walked downstairs together and went to the counter to look at the latest publications. Suddenly Sturge Moore excused himself, went upstairs and, returning after a few moments, looking puzzled, he asked the lady at the counter whether he had left his cap there before going up for the reading. She smiled and said: "But it is there under your arm!" With an "Oh! of course", Sturge Moore returned from his poetic reverie to mundane reality. Sarojini came down chatting with Walter de la Mare, and they both enjoyed my narration of this hilarious episode.

An Indian deputation consisting of Bhupendra Nath Basu, Sachchidanand Sinha and Mazharul Haq, led by Mrs. Besant, was the next sensation in Indian circles. Jinnah and Sarojini, being on the spot, were added to the deputation. A public meeting was arranged at Queens Hall where Mrs. Besant spoke to a packed house – some five thousand, I should think, who heard her in pin-drop silence – for ninety minutes without any notes. I then realised why she was reckoned among the six great orators of the world. She spoke in a rich, manly voice of distinct timbre and volume, enunciating each word distinctly, and built perfect periods in a glorious crescendo, looking confidently from side to side without moving an inch from her

original stand, and drawing plaudits at will. Short, and full in body, her remarkable head with a mass of bobbed silvery hair shaking with every accented syllable, she was an unforgettable picture. A classical aura radiated from her person.

The summer of 1914 was drawing near, and Sarojini's sojourn too. And a potentially big event of my life suddenly crystallised out of the transparent air like the morning dew. Sarojini was at this time staying as a guest in Sir Krishna Govind Gupta's big house in Clanricarde Gardens. One day she announced that a beautiful girl had arrived from Hyderabad and was in the charge of Lady (then Mrs.) Pinhey, wife of the Political Resident at Hyderabad. The girl's name was Laiq, and she was the granddaughter of Sir Afsarul Mulk, Army Member of the Hyderabad State Council and commander-in-chief of the Nizam's forces. Her parents hoped that under Sarojini's chaperonage she might meet an eligible young man in London. In fact, some of her relations had an eye on Jinnah, the famous bachelor. Sarojini herself did not regard this as a feasible idea, though there would of course be occasion for Jinnah and the girl to meet. Sarojini was full of praises of the girl's looks, training and family background, and told me that she had a receptive mind still awaiting formation. Why should not I take my chance, if I was not wedded to bachelorhood? It was a stimulating suggestion.

A biggish tea party was arranged, it being understood that I and the young lady in question should meet half an hour before the arrival of the other guests. This was as romantic as I could hope for if I was to marry an Indian girl; in the Muslim society of that time in India I could not hope even to catch a glimpse of one prior to marriage. By now I was quite clear that I was not going to marry an English girl. I had known enough of the tragedy of English women marrying Indians and coming out to India. If one married in England one must stay there. My desire to settle down in England was fast receding, with the maturing mind now turning homeward. So this meeting was pregnant with decisive possibilities for me.

I was the first to arrive at Clanricarde Gardens. Gunnu was there to receive me, while Sarojini was dressing for the party or, as we used to say, 'to kill'. Gunnu and I sat in the alcove of the drawing room, from where we could see everyone coming in. Our conversation centred round the impending meeting and its possibilities. She was sure of my triumph but was not too optimistic about my satisfaction. "After all," she said, "you must not expect a child to keep pace with your mind." But I was confident of moulding a plastic mind, Sarojini sailed into the drawing room, and our talk proceeded on another level. Then came a knock at the outer door and my heart, filled with vague expectations, stood still for a moment. The outer door was opened, and shut with a bang, steps coming up were heard,

and the maid opened the drawing room door.

A fair girl with a round face, in a somewhat flamboyant sari, accompanied by an English lad, came in and rushed forward to kiss Sarojini, with apologies for being late. The chaperon was Robert Pinhey who advanced, shook hands with Sarojini and presented Mrs. Pinhey's excuses. He wished to be excused himself for going away, but he would come back to fetch Miss Laiq after doing some shopping. Introductions were made. Laiq bowed to me politely, and plunged into a rapid conversation with Sarojini. Gunnu and I exchanged glances. The first impression made me a favourable neutral. The girl was neither a beauty nor particularly magnetic. But how did she react? I had no indication.

Other guests began to arrive. By Gunnu's adroit manoeuvre Laiq and I found ourselves sitting next to each other in the swelling crowd. Jinnah was late and last. Laiq was introduced, and the same polite bow as in my case followed. Jinnah was dignified and distant. All conversation was in Sarojini's hands. She sparkled and drew ripples of admiring laughter all round, coaxing some, bullying others, and generally radiating dazzling brightness. It was a new experience for poor unsophisticated Laiq. Jinnah was too high and aloof in his dignity. Result? My neighbour found in me a natural refuge, and I began to find my neutrality thawing under the gentle warmth of her timid friendliness. A basis for a common footing was growing out of the very atmosphere of the drawing room. Her mind appeared to me to be like a virgin sheet of handmade paper, of indifferent texture. "Yes, I can write a poem on it", I said to myself. What can you do with a developed mind? Either like it or dislike it. But here was a chance to develop a mind to your liking. How vain inexperienced youth can be. The party went off with a bang. The guests departed, Jinnah among them. Laiq's chaperon came back to fetch her, and Gunnu urged me to see the young lady off to the street door. When I returned, Gunnu declared: "You have won, but are you satisfied?" Her feminine instinct made her sure of the one and doubtful of the other.

I accompanied Gunnu on a visit to Tumbridge Wells where Laiq was staying with the Pinheys. As we were emerging from the railway station, Laiq came running, in English clothes and a straw hat which ill suited her, again apologising for being late. This time she greeted me with a confidence born of the knowledge that I was a suitor. We visited the local sights together. It was agreed that we would correspond; her guardian allowed it. Her letters confirmed my impression of a mouldable mind.

Gunnu arranged for a further meeting. She invited Laiq and another Hyderabad girl (now the dowager Maharani of Nabha) to stay with her for a weekend in a house near Kew Gardens. I was also invited for the weekend. This resulted in a formal proposal and acceptance, subject of course to her parents' consent – which it was taken for granted would



follow. I celebrated the occasion by taking the whole party, together with Catherine, Chatto's wife, to see 'The Picture of Dorian Grey' which had been dramatised and put on the stage, and a supper afterwards. The formal proposal was sent to Hyderabad, with Mrs. Naidu's commendation in words of which I could be proud.

Choosing a partner for life is undoubtedly a most decisive event. And I thought I had taken the plunge. But my emotional purism was shocked to discover by a sheer accident that Laiq had been affianced before, and a likeness of her former fiancée (he is now her husband) was still worn in a locket. It was guilelessly removed by her after I had noticed it. The foundation on which I stood heaved. Although I recovered from the shock, it left a crack in the sapphire tower of idealised perfection. We carried on correspondence for the few weeks she remained in England. I commended to her Emerson's conception of Friendship, for she pleaded that she had not known me long enough for love, which she confidently hoped would follow. I sent her Alice Meynell's poems and my own. And I wrote letters in my perfervid style. Gunnu one day said to me: "You are frightening that child out of her wits with your poetry and intellectual stuff." She had written to Gunnu confessing her inability to keep pace with my expectations.

We met once again before she left for India, but briefly, at Brighton where Mrs. Pinhey was staying with her sister. I planned to go as far as Brindisi to see her off. Chatto was inviting me to Heidelberg where he had gone, and he was inviting his sister too. I could go from Heidelberg to Brindisi. but when I was in Heidelberg I heard from Laiq asking me not to proceed to Brindisi "for there would be so many people on board the steamer bound for India, and you know our Muslim customs." I was not prepared for this, and my disappointment was great. Was she not duly affianced to me? Why should she mind anyone talking about it? But Gunnu the wise explained that Hyderabad society was peculiar and, since they would not understand, I should not embarrass her.

My meeting with Chatto at Heidelberg turned out to be the last. I stayed at Kolhöv Hotel on the hill, above the river Neckar. It had a beautiful situation and commanded a fine view. Chatto was in love with a German girl who was in the incipient stage of tuberculosis and was also staying at the Kalhov. Gunnu and Ranbir (Ranbir Chand Sohni, a mathematical prodigy who was my class fellow at St. Stephen's, and is now a barrister at Lahore) also took up residence in the same hotel.

After receiving Laiq's letter I cut short my stay in Heidelberg and decided to return to London via Paris. The day I was leaving, Chatto became very sentimental. He was sure that a war was in the offing (it was in fact only a few weeks ahead) and felt that this might be our last meeting. "Well, my boy," he said in a sad vein foreign to his jovial temperament, "you are

going home, you will marry and settle down and I wish you the best of luck. We are parting for God knows how long." For full thirty years I have not met Chatto but I have never ceased to cherish affection for him. I have learnt from others that the romance of his political life reached its climax in the First World War, when he was in a high position in Germany. He was last heard of as a prisoner in Russia, and if the rumour is true he died in detention there.

I still remember how Chatto insisted on travelling with me part of the distance. We got into a closed car which wound its way down the hill in drizzling rain, through typical hill scenery and dripping pines. We said goodbye at Meinheime, and were not to meet again. Chatto was a delightful companion, and was happier with Muslim friends than with others – a result of earlier associations in Hyderabad. His last message to me through Dr. Ansari, who met him in 1933 or 1934 in Germany, was: "Give my love to that scoundrel."

In Paris I chanced to meet, for the last time, my Egyptian friends Dr. Mansoor Rifat and His Excellency Farid Bey. They happened to be staying in the Elysee Palace Annexe, and on discovering me Mansoor persuaded me to shift there from the hotel next door. This led on to Mansoor playing upon me an unforgettable practical joke. One evening we went out for a walk and on our way back to the hotel, we stopped for a cup of chocolate at a nearby open-air cafe. Mansoor found a pretty young woman, whom he knew, at the cafe and invited her to the hotel. My room was on the first floor, and the three of us walked into it for a chat. Mansoor pretended to go up to his room for a moment to attend to something, and locked my room from outside. I kept waiting for his return, but the girl proceeded to make the bed. I was quite willing to sleep in the chair, I told her, and she could have the bed. But she had apparently been instructed by Mansoor, and said that it was, to say the least, humiliating to be treated thus. I explained that I was not pretending to be a saint, but I simply could not be disloyal to the person to whom I had very recently become engaged. I appealed to her to be reasonable. Would she forgive her fiancé, if she had one, should he share the bed with another woman, whatever the circumstances? She admitted that she would not, and then said sweetly that she would help me out of the situation if I rang for the roomboy. The concierge answered the bell, and after an explanation by her (I could not speak French) he unlocked the door and let her out. The next morning Mansoor came into my room wreathed in smiles, and certified me a 'good boy'.

It was also at the Elysee Palace Annexe that I saw a Turkish woman, with bobbed hair, eating pork and drinking wine like any European, and was shocked. Farid Bey remarked that the 'enlightened' or 'emancipated' Turks had no scruples, having taken to the ways of modern civilisation.

This was in 1914, when Mustapha Kemal (Ataturk), the great moderniser, was not heard of outside his army circles.

On returning to London I began to have my books and things packed up for the voyage back to India. My mother was very happy about my betrothal but Rauf sounded less than enthusiastic. This was perhaps because Rauf, who had already married, was for some reason sorely disappointed. In fact I had to rebuke him for the manner in which he took the 'arranged' marriage. I had notions of my own about chivalrous conduct even in such circumstances. Later, after the death of his first wife – she suffered from tuberculosis – he married again and it turned out to be a very happy marriage.

Laiq wrote to me from Brindisi telling me how pleasant was the voyage. The Mediterranean sea was calm like a 'milk-pond' (mill-pond, of course), and dances and games kept the passengers busy and amused. I was disappointed in my expectation of hearing from every port on the way, and immediately on her landing in Bombay. But my mind was aflame with anticipations which found copious expression in regular letters. In reply to my bulky outpourings, Laiq said that as it was not customary in Muslim society in Hyderabad to allow correspondence between betrothed couples, it would be better if I wrote sparingly although it was not what she herself would wish, and in any case I should not expect to get regular replies. This made me wonder whether Laiq and I were really made for each other temperamentally, but I put her attitude down to the cramping customs of orthodox society.

At the National Liberal Club where I stayed, our group was joined by Rama Shankar Bajpai. He one day brought his younger brother Girja (now Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, Agent General in the U.S.A.) who was preparing for the I.C.S. examination. Jinnah, Syud, Rama Shankar and I had our own corner and spent the time reading, playing billiards and attending the lectures by Cabinet Ministers and other notables whom the Club invited. Britain's declaration of war on Germany drove Lord Morley and John Burns immediately out of the Cabinet. They were not prepared to sign the death warrant of millions, so rumour in the Club had it. As news of the war spread, there were wild demonstrations and mass singing of the national anthem. Young men and women went about shouting and whistling, and showing all the symptoms of mass hysteria. Reports were afloat that Turkey was about to be arrayed as a belligerent.

One day Syed Haider Riza turned up from Oxford. I took him to the Indian Restaurant on Chancery Lane for a change. Riza, Syud and I were at one table, and an Abyssinian sat at the next table. He was a slightly built, pockmarked, rather indifferently dressed Negro. While we were talking in Urdu among ourselves, he tried to strike up a conversation in broken Hindustani and said: "I have been to your country, hunting tigers." We

were tickled by his whole get-up, broken Urdu and this piece of information, and Riza could not suppress his laugh. The Abyssinian flared up, gripped his table knife and growled: "I am not a slave of the British like you. I am an Abyssinian. If you dare laugh..." His taunt went straight to my heart. I pacified him, recognising in him, despite his unprepossessing looks, the spirit of proud freedom. This incident became a landmark in my life. It occurred at a time when I was becoming increasingly sensitive.

### **Break with Britain**

The five years that Asaf Ali spent in England – from 1909 to 1914, with a year's break in 1912 – were pleasurable and educative. His meetings with several outstanding personalities in London, and visits to countries of Europe, enlarged his mental horizons and refined his aesthetic sensibility. But there was an underlying feeling of guilt and mortification. This was on account of a condition that had been attached to the scholarship, arranged by the friend of the family who was a high official at Simla, which had made possible Asaf Ali's sojourn in Europe. In the autobiography that he started writing while in detention at Ahmadnagar Fort in 1944, and which he intended to complete and to publish, Asaf Ali narrates the unhappy story with a candour and self-reproach that evoke sympathy:

Early in 1908, towards the end of my second year at college, I fell seriously ill. Uncle came from Simla and looked me up. After talking for a while about my illness, he said: "I find that you attend a good many public meetings and are friendly with Haider Riza." How he knew this, I could not guess. "I want you to write to me regularly", he continued, "all about these meetings and any other matters of interest. And you will have a pocket allowance for your stationery and trouble. But this must remain a secret between you and me." I was surprised by this stipulation. I saw no reason why my mother should not know it, and also my friend Rauf. I told them, and neither saw anything wrong in it. Presumably this was his way of training me.

After some months my allowance was increased. Uncle wrote regularly, asked questions, and once he thickly underlined the words: "State facts only, and express no opinion." It arose out of my indignant remarks about an incident I had included in one of my newsletters. An Anglo-Indian municipal official had kicked his punkah-coolie to death. It was the talk of the town, and had aroused a storm of indignation at the brutal conduct of this half-caste. I did not hide my feelings on the subject, and why on earth should I have done so? Didn't Uncle want to know how I felt? I began to wonder why he wanted these newsletters. I understood the reason when, in his reply to one of my letters, addressed to him as usual as 'Deputy Commissioner', he informed me that his proper designation was 'Deputy

Director, Intelligence Department'. Kennedy Lodge, which I had thought was the name of his residence, was the department's headquarters in Simla.

This came as a shock to my awakening conscience. I did not know till then the nature of the work I had been inveigled into. On the other hand, I was hypnotised by Uncle, who had become a protective and awe-inspiring father figure. Breaking with him seemed all but suicide, since he had hinted at the possibility of arranging an official scholarship for me to go to England for higher studies. This would be the chance of a lifetime for me. He expected me, in return, to continue sending newsletters from England and to keep him posted with developments of interest among students and other members of the Indian community.

Intelligence is an administrative necessity for any regime, irrespective of its political character. Successive Prime Ministers of free India have relied as much on the Intelligence Bureau, and Chief Ministers of States on the intelligence wings of the police force, as the British authorities did in their time. What was galling to young Asaf Ali was that working for Uncle meant serving the interests of an alien power. Asaf Ali writes in his autobiography:

I decided, as a compromise, to be no more than a 'journalist', reporting events and speeches. Only such persons as were known to hold certain views would be identified in my correspondence – any journalist does that – and I would say nothing, as far as it rested with me, that might make it uncomfortable for anyone. My dream of going to England came true early in 1909, when I had gone up to the fourth and final year at college. My friend Haider Riza had secured a Shyamji Krishna Varma scholarship, and Uncle decided that I should also proceed to England. I could go, he said, to Cambridge or Oxford, or study for the Bar or for the I.C.S., as I liked, and it was not necessary to take my degree here for that purpose.

The resolve to avoid getting anyone into trouble with the authorities, and to report no more than what a journalist might, served to mollify the adolescent's conscience. Not only did Asaf Ali adhere to this decision, he began to admire and became genuinely friendly with several of the very persons – revolutionaries and other nationalists – whom he had been asked to keep an eye on. Asaf Ali became increasingly unhappy at having to subsist on a dubious scholarship. He writes:

Uncle had, from his perverted point of view, done me an act of kindness by giving me what he regarded – and which indeed was, from the standpoint of a worldly career – a big opening. He little realised that he was taking in hand a mind to which the paradise would soon turn into hell. It is difficult to blame him, for he knew no better; nor would it be easy to blame a youngster who himself knew no better at the time.

Mercifully the nightmare ended when I broke off my connection at the end of 1914. This was before my final return to India. It liberated a bondman.

I then began the reclamation of my soul, redeeming it by serving the cause of the country's freedom. It has entailed, over the last thirty years, repeated prison terms of which the present is the latest.

What precipitated Asaf Ali's termination of the association with Kennedy Lodge, distaste for which had been building up over the years, was the outbreak of hostilities between Britain and Turkey in World War I. The surge of pan-Islamic sentiment which Asaf Ali experienced during his visit to Turkey early in 1912 has been narrated already. Britain's attack on the Ottoman empire during the war that broke out in August 1914 had a traumatic effect on the Indian Muslim community including, with a very few exceptions, the English-educated among the middle class despite their strong cultural affiliations with England. On the emotional break with Britain, Asaf Ali writes:

I was more pro-Turkey than I knew. The entire early training and home influence of sentimental attachment to the Turks sprang into the saddle of my reason and, driven by impulse, my decision was irrevocably taken. I was inexpressibly happy. My resignation was cabled out. Simla must know how war on Turkey was likely to react on Muslims, if I could chuck away what was the promise of a high career.

In the evening as I stepped out of the house of a friend in Ealing, the fragrance of a jasmine flower, which peered from the creeper by the side of the door, wrung from the depth of my heart a paroxysm of nostalgia. I plucked this emblem of purity off its stalk, and put it into my buttonhole as a symbol of the new life I was beginning. Those to whom it is given to have grown up without the accidents of life, and without any blot on their scutcheon, have a right to feel proud of their stainless careers. But I was happy that I succeeded in disentangling myself from a temptingly cosy situation. Mine was an act of non-cooperation at a time when it was not yet known by that name.

I was eager to get back to India. But weeks passed before I could get a passage. At last I left London in mid-December on a wet morning. As my taxi reached Paddington, I found Syud Hossain waiting for me. But he would not hear of saying goodbye there. We travelled down to the Tilbury Docks. As the hooter called the passengers and I said goodbye to Syud, for the first time in the course of our friendship he grew sentimental.

At the approach to Gibraltar the straits presented a picturesque scene. Only a thin strip of water separated Europe and Africa, and joined the Mediterranean sea to the Atlantic ocean. One could see the bleak and forbidding rocks of Gibraltar on one side, and the white Moroccan houses on the other, dreaming in the sun. As I was pacing the deck, there came before my mind's eye the invasion of Spain by Tariq, the Arab general who has been immortalised in the name Gibraltar – Gebelutariq, Tariq's Rock. How I wanted to see Cordoba, Seville, Granada and all that the Moors of Spain have left to posterity.!

The social atmosphere on the boat -- SS 'Arabia' of P & O--was rotten. The returning Anglo-Indians were a standoffish lot. On the other hand a young English girl, going out to India for the first time, happened to be my neighbour on the deck and confided, before we reached Malta, that she had been advised by some Anglo-Indians not to be friendly with Indians. She rejected this interference with her liberty, and made it a point to pull her deck chair next to mine.

Another fellow passenger was a Mr. Robertson, who was principal of a college in Ahmadabad. He became fairly friendly, but in what struck me as a somewhat patronising manner. When we sailed into Port Said we found the harbour gaily festooned, and our steamer too was docked out with flags and buntings. A salute of guns was fired, and I wondered what great victory all this was intended to celebrate. It turned out that our ship was carrying the papers for the annexation of Egypt. Under the pretext of seizing a nominally Turkish port of the Ottoman empire, Britain had pounced upon the defenceless Egyptians and robbed them of their land. Principal Robertson said to me: "Well, Mr. Ali, do you know that we have got a fine new dependency?" On my growling out a 'Yes', he persisted with: "You don't seem to like it, do you?" "No more", I said, "than would the owner of a house, whose home has been burgled by brigands, when he is asked his opinion of the valuables seized by them. As an Asiatic, I regard Egypt as much my home as India, and I took upon this annexation as brigandage." Robertson reddened to the roots of the hair. But he managed to speak with restrained acerbity, trying to defend his Government's action. For the rest of the journey up to Aden we barely exchanged greetings.

The ship reached Suez when the sun had gone down. The horizon and the sky were dipped in bright and sombre colours. I wrote a poem in Urdu—a war song passionately rousing Muslims for the defence of Kaba.

At Aden (at that time part of British India) I went ashore to send cables to Delhi, Bombay and Hyderabad. As I stood at the counter writing out the messages intimating arrival, I felt a heavy tap between my shoulder blades and simultaneously came Robertson's voice: "Well, my boy, we are in India now, and you should be more careful with your tongue." I do not remember what exactly I said in reply, but it was an outburst of some sort for he pleaded the privilege of age and experience, and added: "I meant it for your own good." The words stung me. He had bluntly stated the bitter truth that I was a free man only so long as I did not touch the soil of my country.

Incident after incident was thus laying the foundations in my mind for the assertion of personal self-respect which, in the circumstances, was bound up with India's political status. The sense of self-respect is like a self-active tendon of the soul. Only paralysed tissue will fail to react. These

incidents gave a point to the spear of mind and values that I was to wield in the rest of my life's battle on this planet.

## NOTES

1. *Selected Works of Motilal Nehru*, Vol. I (p. 65), Vikas, 1982.
2. *ibid.* (p. 149).
3. At that time a Judge of the Court of Small Causes, he later became Law Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council.
4. *Selected Works of Motilal Nehru*, Vol. I (p. 153).
5. Leading practitioner of indigenous medicine, Hakim Ajmal Khan (1865-1927) was a nationalist who was president of the Indian National Congress in 1921.
6. Sardarsingh Ravabhai Rana belonged to the old ruling Rajput family of Limbdi in Saurashtra. After graduating from Bombay in 1898 he studied law in London and was called to the Bar. He then settled in Paris. A supporter of V.D. Savarkar, he stored copies of the proscribed work on India's First War of Independence. They used to be smuggled into India under the covers of *Pickwick Papers* and other literary works.
7. A lawyer who was practising at Rangoon, Aiyer went to London to qualify for the English Bar. Though he started by wanting to get lessons in English music and dancing, the influence of Savarkar transformed his outlook.
8. Entrance examinations, after which successful students took up different branches of study in the 'schools' of the university.
- 9 *Veer Savarkar* by Dhananjay Keer, Popular Prakashan, 1966 (second edition).
10. *ibid.* (p. 63)
11. Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama (1861-1936), from an affluent Parsi family of Bombay, was one of the earliest to take to the revolutionary path. She lived abroad from 1902 and was associated in London and Europe with the revolutionary leaders Shyamji Krishna Varma, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, V.D. Savarkar and Lala Har Dayal.



## 4. First Steps in Public Life

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Asaf Ali's career at the Bar and in public life commenced soon after his final return to India in January 1915. He developed his skills as a publicist through the Press and on the platform, and as an organiser, first in building up the Delhi branch of the Home Rule League and then on behalf of the Indian National Congress and the Khilafat movement. The lapse of his engagement while in London with a young lady of Hyderabad freed him to apply a large part of his time to public work. In the autobiographical notes he wrote in 1944 at Ahmadnagar Fort, Asaf Ali describes his home coming, the initial hurdles which he had to overcome, and the beginnings of his work in promotion of public causes:

SS 'Arabia' steamed into Bombay harbour on the 5th of January 1915.

When I awoke, the ship lay at anchor and passengers were getting ready to alight. I was delighted to find Rauf in a boat coming towards the ship. When he came up I found that he had put on weight and looked a prosperous lawyer. We embraced each other, and he explained that he had got a case in which he was required to examine some witnesses in Hyderabad and had arranged the commission in such a way that he could finish his work there and come to Bombay to receive me.

We went to the Majestic, and after breakfast settled down to a palaver. We had so much to tell each other. But M.K. Azad was impatient and wanted us to go with him to his new home. It was not till after dinner that Rauf and I returned to the hotel and could complete our talk. Rauf had arranged to leave for Delhi the next morning, while I was to pay a visit to Hyderabad to see Laiq and her people and, of course, Sarojini Naidu, the match-maker friend and elder sister.

I was Sarojini's guest in Hyderabad, and she was an ideal hostess. Every detail of comfort was carefully arranged, and engagements were thoughtfully spread over the period of my stay. They included a reception at which Hyderabad's elite were present, and a small dinner at Sir Akbar Hydari's who showed us the beautiful manuscripts and exquisite works of art in his

collection. There was an outing to Golconda, and a visit with Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu to a masonic function. At a breakfast meeting with Sir Afsarul Mulk, Commander-in-Chief of the Nizam's army and grandfather of Laiq on the mother's side, I found him a fine representative of the now vanishing type of Hyderabad gentleman. Last but not least was a meeting with Laiq's father over tea.

In between my engagements Laiq managed to put through a telephone call to welcome me and tell me that her grandfather (Sir Afsar) had approved of me, and apologising for not meeting me--it was not done. Somehow, the fact that Laiq was not allowed to meet me chilled me. It began to look more and more like a conventionally arranged match, and I was left wondering whether it would succeed. Moreover, after getting a look at the social milieu of Laiq's people, I was more than a little frightened. I could not reproduce those conditions of ease and affluence in Delhi. What was more, I had decided on a life of political participation and struggle against the established order. Would it suit Laiq? I left Hyderabad with an uneasy mind.

On reaching Delhi, I found a marked change in the political atmosphere. There was a wave of excitement and indignation among the Muslims over Britain's war with Turkey. The Ali Brothers had become the focus. Ansari had returned from Turkey to a great welcome. Maulana Zafar Ali, too, had received a most remarkable ovation in Delhi on his return. His procession through Delhi was marked by a tragedy. A young child of nine was trampled to death. But the father came up to the hero of the occasion, laid the body of the child at his feet and declared that he was proud that his only child lay a sacrifice at Maulana's feet. He would not mind thus sacrificing many children in the way of Islam. It showed how deeply attached Indian Muslims were to Turkey as custodian of the Holy Places. Mohammad Ali had written in the *Comrade* a long and passionately bellicose article, under the caption 'The Choice of the Turks'. It drew upon him the fire of the Press Act, under which the article was declared forfeit. He was preparing to fight it out. Mohammad Ali was led by the misfortune of Turkey and the attitude of the Indian Government to throw away the moderate traditions of the Muslim League.

Muslim politics, which had been timid, petty and narrow, took giant strides forward. Abul Kalam with his *Al Hilal* in Calcutta had become a strident voice among the Muslims. Mohammad Ali with his *Comrade* and *Hamdard* in Delhi, and Zafar Ali with his *Zamindar* in Lahore, were similarly voicing Muslim feeling. Prayers were commonly said in mosques for Turkey's victory. It did not take me even a couple of days to realise all this--the atmosphere was electric. I was happy. The depression I had brought from Hyderabad was dissipated.

Financially, however, my position was unenviable. I was already in debt,

and my paternal grandmother's periodic presents out of the income of the village were insufficient for my current needs. My mother, the eternal standby, came to my rescue. Our house in Kucha Chelan was mortgaged to raise about Rs.5,000. Part of it went to the extinction of the debt I owed, and the balance would meet my needs for some time.

On the social side, meanwhile, life was full of fun. Dinners and music performances at Mohammad Ali's, Ansari's and my houses filled our evenings. Mohammad Ali's reckless entertainments set the pace and I, his neighbour and almost constant companion, had to keep in step. I was in any case myself temperamentally extravagant, and nothing delighted me more than having a party of friends to entertain. Ansari was more methodical but a generous host. The Orient Club (non-whiteman's) was often our rendezvous. Our circle included Abdul Rahman (now Sir, Judge of the Lahore High Court) and some members of the Turkish medical mission who have since attained prominent places in public life— Choudhry Khaliquzzaman and Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, now leaders of the Muslim League, and Shoeb Qureshi who is a minister in Bhopal.

The ferment of agitation among the Mussalmans was daily on the increase. Mohammad Ali established a weekly platform in the Jami Masjid, where his speeches were eagerly awaited and listened to by large crowds after the Friday prayers. This platform was open to other speakers if they had something to say to engage the attention of the gathering. Shaukat Ali's Khuddam-i-Kaba movement was spreading. The organisation had an office and a paid staff, supported by financial donations. Members of the volunteer corps wore a distinctive dress, with the caps bearing the words 'Servants of Kaba'. The organisation had recruiting branches in various centres. The Ali Brothers were fast eclipsing other Muslim leaders.

The appeal of the Aga Khan, living abroad, and of the moderate leaders in Aligarh and elsewhere was on the wane. In Delhi, the weekly meetings and speeches in the central mosque were disapproved by the loyalist elders of the Muslim community who constituted the committee of management nominated by the Government. Hakim Ajmal Khan was a distinguished elder whose training in the Rampur Court and generally friendly relations with government officials inclined him at this time to be on the side of moderation. This jarred on Mohammad Ali's nerves. He even went the length of suspecting Hakimji as a spy and an agent of the government, specially because of his cordial relations with Sir Ali Imam, member of the Viceroy's Council. Mohammad Ali's opinion of Hakimji changed completely later on. At this time, however, he was too full of his own zeal to think of any moderating influence as anything but weak-kneed retreat if not treachery. Mohammad Ali was not much of a judge of men. His attitude towards Abul Kalam, and even Ansari, was one of patronage.

## Invitation to Afghan Amir

It was not uncommon for Mohammad Ali to drop in of evenings and send for his dinner from his house next door, and stay on talking in my bachelor's quarters. One evening he and Ansari came for dinner. It was a pot-luck affair. Mohammad Ali mentioned that a communication was being sent to the Afghan ruler, Amir Habibullah Khan, to declare war on the British in India as a mark of sympathy with Turkey. The emissary (Maulana Abul Kalam tells me that it was Molvi Obaidullah) was instructed to look out for a certain issue of *Hamdard* which would carry a particular verse from Hafiz which was to be a code of confirmation of his credentials in Kabul. He was to mention this fact at the time of presenting the communication so that, should there be any doubt, the appearance of the verse would serve as confirmation of the genuineness of his mission. I ventured to say something expressing doubt about the advisability of inviting the Amir's intervention. But it was confidently asserted that the Afghans would only help India to regain her freedom, and they could be rewarded, if necessary, with the Frontier tracts. It did not appear to me likely that a conqueror would go the length of lavishing the fruits of his victory on a people who could not help themselves. But the step had been decided upon, and there was no point in arguing about it.

Shaukat was at this time in a fanatical mood. His outpourings (I do not mean about the Afghan affair which, it was maintained, was a secret of the grave) were uncontrollable. He would get into a tonga, for instance, and if the driver was a Muslim he would pat him on the back and say, "Keep ready, the time's come", meaning the time for a Jihad--crusade or revolution. And if you tried to reason Shaukat into discretion, he would turn upon you with "Coward, coward! A true Muslim should fear none but God." And yet, he was capable of wide tolerance and understanding. In many ways he was a bigger man than Mohammad Ali.

A versifier who was on the editorial staff of *Hamdard* was commissioned to compose a poem in Urdu incorporating the Persian verse of Hafiz which was to serve as the code. I have not the slightest doubt in my mind that this 'secret of the grave' was known not only to some of the editorial staff but to several others, for it was difficult for the Ali Brothers to be tight-lipped about anything. Moreover, the plan for Afghan intervention was not confined to the Ali Brothers but had other sponsors too.

The date of the *Comrade's* appeal in the High Court was drawing near. Mohammad Ali went to Lahore to instruct Beechy, an Anglo-Indian barrister who was the leader of the criminal Bar and was known as a vigorous advocate--and indeed as a 'bully'. I followed, reaching Lahore just a day before the hearing. Mohammad Ali had written home to ask for the legislative proceedings regarding the Press Act. I took with me the report of the debate. A consultation with Beechy on the morning of the

hearing revealed that the legislative proceedings would be of no help, for the law speaks for itself and its interpretation cannot be sought in the speeches of the legislators or even of the Government's spokesman. Why it should be so is not easily comprehensible, for after all who should know the intention of a legislation better than those who enact it? Mohammad Ali was anxious to argue his case himself or at least to supplement his advocate's argument. "You know," he laughingly told Beechy, "I am a bit of a lawyer myself." He had studied law in India but had not taken the final examination. And in any case he knew as much about the Press law as any lawyer. But Beechy was doubtful if it was good policy to allow the party concerned to argue his own case, even if at the tail end. As for me, Beechy welcomed a junior, but there was really little for me to do.

When the court assembled, the room was crowded by lawyers who wanted to hear the arguments. It was a cause celebre. Sir Alfred Kensington presided and Johnston and Rattigan, JJ, sat on either side of him. This was my first appearance in the High Court. Beechy opened his argument, which before long gathered vigour and force. Somehow he could not bring himself round to 'my Lord' the Judges. Beechy was quoting the rulings of different High Courts in support of his argument, when Johnston piped out: "But, Mr. Beechy, we are not bound by the rulings of other courts." "No," thundered Beechy, "but you are bound hand and foot by law." The appeal was lost on law and facts, and the acerbity with which Mohammad Ali supplemented Beechy's argument was noted and mentioned in the judgment.

That evening Mohammad Ali and I attended a dinner at Sir Zulfiqar's where I met the poet Mohammad Iqbal for the first time. Iqbal was persuaded to recite some of his poetry. He was at this time writing his masterpiece *Asrar-i-Bekhudi* (Secrets of Self-forgetfulness--a Sufi concept), which he afterwards named *Ramuz-i-Khudi* (Hidden Essence of the Self). He recited the portion known as the simile of the *tooti* (a songbird) and the dew drop. A thirsty bird in search of water caught sight of a brilliant object which looked like a drop of water aglow under the sun's rays, and went and put its beak to it. But it was a piece of diamond, and the bird had to leave it alone to challenge the splendour of the sun. The bird sighted another bright spot on the leaf of a rose bush, and found it to be a dew drop, which it sucked up. The poet draws the lesson that only hardness could save the entity of the precious stone. He therefore advises the listener to be like *dana-i-ilmas* (a grain of adamant) and not *qatra-i-shabnam* (drop of dew).

Iqbal was now showing a disinclination for Urdu as the medium of his poetic afflatus. "I do not find Urdu", he said, "capable of conveying the finer shades of meaning I am seeking to express." And someone in the company added that Persian would, in addition, carry his message to a

wider audience beyond the frontiers of India--in Afghanistan, Persia and Central Asia. Iqbal's vision was extending beyond India and he was addressing himself to the entire Muslim world. And his philosophy he derived from Nietzsche's *Will to Power* a copy of which stared me in the face from Zulfiqar's bookshelf in his study where we were seated.

My mail at this time included letters now and then from Hyderabad, some from Sarojini Naidu and a few from Laiq. Sarojini's letters were sometimes accompanied by her new poems. Laiq was hinting that her people were anxious to have a date named soon by me for our marriage. Laiq's father wrote to me thereafter, asking me to fix a date for the marriage since he was being approached with other proposals. On top of this came a telegraphic message from Laiq in similar terms.

I was taken aback. These messages seemed to reduce our betrothal to an arranged match subject to competition. My financial situation, and the bleak prospect of the time, made it impossible for me to think of marriage for quite some time to come. I thought it over and came to the conclusion that, in the first place, in terms of emotion and sentiment this match had long been declining from the level of mutual affinity and ideality at which I had conceived it. Secondly, on practical grounds I did not hope to be in a position, for some years, to support Laiq in a style of living to which she was accustomed and which she had a right to expect. It was therefore clear that, from her standpoint and in her own interest, she should be free to consider other proposals. I had no right to stand in the way. Having reached this decision, I wired back that she was released from her promise. Somewhere at the back of my mind there lingered the thought that a protest from Laiq might restore the degree of emotion and sentiment which alone could revitalise the relationship and provide the spiritual sustenance for a long wait if necessary. The wording of my telegram was in a sense a test. The test proved the correctness of my decision.

My mother was terribly grieved. She felt that I was needlessly precipitate. "Why," she told me in a reminiscent mood, "your father's people had to beg and implore my parents for five long years." She could not understand why I should resent the reference to 'other proposals'. "There is nothing wrong about it", she said, and cited a proverb in Urdu to the effect: 'Stones will be cast into a house which has a plum tree.' And here I was, seeking an affinity of values and not a mere wife. My mother was almost inconsolable for some weeks. Time proved that my decision was right.

Not long after Mohammad Ali and I returned from Lahore, the plan to invite the Amir of Afghanistan became known to the British authorities. This had astounding consequences for me. My friend Rauf came to see me one evening, after his court work, in a highly agitated state. He said: "Well, here is the reward for your patriotic and Islamic fantasies, and for your heroic break with the Government"--or words to that effect. Rauf had been

told during the day by a common friend that Mohammad Ali had been informed by a highly placed source that the authorities had come to know of the mission to Kabul and that I had betrayed the secret. The effect of this on me was indescribable: no thunderbolt, no sudden opening of a chasm under my feet could have been worse. Rauf, who was my second self from whom there was no secret, knew I was guiltless, and was fuming with indignation at the false accusation. I was left dazed and limp. Here I was, a reborn soul, tarred with a vile lie just when I felt the cleanest.

Gradually, as I reflected on my predicament, it became clear to me that the misinformant of the Ali Brothers must have known of my former connection and made from it the slanderous inference that I was the source of the Government's information. I made up my mind to speak to Mohammad Ali himself, and invite him to put to the test the truth of the allegation. But he avoided me like poison. I was cut to the raw of my soul that, after the intimate friendship between us, he did not come to me straight and challenge me, thus giving me a chance to clear myself. I then turned to Shaukat, whom I regarded as more reasonable, less excitable. I caught him at the mosque and brought him to my home in Kucha Chelan, and poured out my heart. Shaukat appeared to be decent about it--or, if you like, diplomatic--and said: "Yes, Mohammad is too ready to lend his ear to others." The actual expression he used in Urdu was, *woh kanon ke kachhe hain*. But matters did not improve. On the contrary I came under a pall of obloquy. The Ali Brothers were interned in mid-1915 at Mehrauli in Delhi and then moved to a place in the Central Provinces. This made their popularity rise even higher, and my reputation sank correspondingly. Not infrequently I was in a desperate and suicidal mood.

Finally it occurred to me that the only way to wipe out not merely this unmerited blot but the entire past was to make a clean breast of the truth to my close friends and elder colleagues. The rumour had travelled within weeks to Hyderabad, and Sarojini wrote to me most sympathetically, refusing to believe it. Luckily she happened to come to Delhi, and was staying with Ansari. It required courage to face them, but my passion for a clean-up and, in Gandhiji's phrase, 'experiment with truth' braced me up. If I could not win them with an honest recital of truth, I must lose them. Either they should know and accept me as I was, or I must reconcile myself to the clean deprivation of their friendship. The decision taken, an appointment was made. Ansari took me into an inner room where Sarojini was. She sat on a bed, and I took a chair facing Ansari and her. Ansari sat through my recital with his big, bushy eyebrows arched high, indicating tense but patient attention. Sarojini, in a similar strained mood, ran her tongue every now and then over her lips as if they were dry. My story was simply, frankly and honestly narrated, perhaps with inevitable emotion. At the end of the interview, Ansari led me out through the zenana

apartment to my carriage. Before saying goodbye he warmly shook my hand and said: "Asaf, I feel so relieved."

Then, on a visit to Simla, I went straight to Jinnah and told him the whole story of my life, in brief, without any reserve. My faith in him was great, and not in vain. "Others", he said with one of his rare, charming smiles, "have their fling in other ways, and you had your fling in that way. Well, my boy, my advice to you is to lie low for some time". This gave me new strength. After all, the world was not bereft of persons who were prepared to believe me. For this I owe Jinnah a great debt of gratitude, although it is a misfortune that in politics we have been poles as under for some years now.

Over a period, I took into my confidence Maulana Abul Kalam and other friends. The coping-stone of the restoration of my self-confidence, and I imagine the confidence of others in me, was laid by Gandhiji. In 1919 he was in Delhi in connection with the evidence to be tendered by nationalist India before the Hunter Committee that had been appointed to inquire into the atrocities at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. In connection with a brief I had been asked to prepare, I met him and in the course of the interview he referred laughingly to my past association. I felt absolved and grateful. But the intervening years were the most difficult that I have lived through. Every day brought black moments of despair, and each time I had to grit my teeth and tell myself that I must keep working undesperingly, at the Bar where my career lay and in public service which drew my heart.

### As Lawyer and Publicist

About this time Rauf was engaged in the Koma Gata Maru conspiracy case and had to go to Lahore. He had got on well in Delhi, and did not want to lose his clientele. Rauf urged me to take his place in his chambers in his absence, which was likely to last a year or so. It offered me a chance to start off without a wait, though it meant maintaining and building up Rauf's clientele rather than my own practice. But such considerations were beside the point where Rauf and I were concerned. I agreed.

I made a very fair start with the cases already pending, and my work was appreciated. In a civil case which attracted some attention, the Judge complimented me in open court on what he called my able advocacy, and said: "But I have to decide the issue against your client." The personal compliment was of no earthly use to me in practice. Now I concentrated on criminal cases, and got on fairly well. Mohammadan law also came my way. In the intervals of waiting for briefs I occupied my time with reading and with writing poems and literary essays for Urdu periodicals. There was little of public activity, Delhi having lapsed into somnolence after the closing down of the *Comrade* and *Hamdard*; only the *Detenus' Help*



Society worked as a fund collecting and distributing agency, and organised occasional meetings. Hakim Sahib commissioned me to draft an amended constitution of the Tibbia College in English, and it kept me busy for some time.

My first eruption into the Press on a political topic was occasioned by a minatory speech in 1916 by Sir James (later Lord) Meston, Governor of the United Provinces, directed at the pro-Turkish Muslim agitators. I wrote a biting rejoinder to Meston in the *Tribune*, the well known Indian-edited English daily of Lahore in the course of which I told the satrap that the "brandishing of the Penal Code at every turn is unbecoming." This maiden effort was well received in the circle of my acquaintances, and even outside, and so was an article I contributed to the *Modern Review* of Calcutta on 'Milton's Categories of Public Men'. This was a cumbersome caption, and I should perhaps have called it 'Satan's Cabinet'. It was my thesis that Milton had described the types of leaders of men of all times, with Mephistopheles as the supreme hero. I followed this up with a longer and more elaborate article on 'Urdu Culture' which was published by *East and West*, founded by Malabari, which was in the hands of Sardar (later Sir) Jogender Singh. The article, which maintained that Urdu was not only a language but was the vehicle of a culture and an outlook, brought plentiful compliments from many who could judge. This gave me the feeling of confidence that I could supplement my income from legal practice with journalistic activity. (Rauf had come back to Delhi at the conclusion of the Lahore case, and I returned to my house where I turned my study into my chambers). My work as a publicist could also serve the public causes which I had at heart.

Among daily newspapers only the British-run *Pioneer* and the *Statesman* were known to pay their contributors well. But I had nothing for them, and everything against them. As luck would have it, Syud Hossain came back to India as assistant editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, a first-grade Indian newspaper of those days. I went to Bombay to see Syud who, friendly and understanding as ever, generously opened to me the columns of the newspaper.

It was in the latter half of 1916 that I stepped on to the public platform for the first time in India. One day Lala Pearey Lal, who was on his way to becoming a flourishing motor dealer and who at the same time took interest in public affairs, came along accompanied by Miss Gmeiner. An elderly Australian lady, she was the Principal of the Indraprastha Girls' School (now a flourishing College). A devoted follower of Annie Besant both in theosophy and in politics, she was respected by all who knew her. I was somewhat surprised when Miss Gmeiner said to me: "We have come to ask you to take the chair at a public meeting tomorrow which we are getting up for Mr. H.S.L. Polak, an English colleague and friend of Mr.

Gandhi's in South Africa." I felt that it would be inappropriate to have a junior lawyer for the chair on such an occasion, and one of the older and leading citizens should be approached. Miss Gmeiner explained that Ansari and Hakimji were away, and another gentleman, a prominent lawyer, had declined to preside. So even a Briton could be an objectionable political figure in the eyes of the respectable! This decided me.

Since the visitor we were welcoming was a good speaker and a sincere friend of India, I thought I might liken his speeches to the work of the unique artist (in a story finely told by the South African writer Olive Schreiner) whose pictures were unsurpassed for their strange colours: only after the artist's death was it discovered that he had a wound in his heart, and his pictures used to be coloured with his heart's blood. The meeting took place in a hired theatre hall. Nearly half the front seats were taken up by the Superintendent of Police and his officer colleagues, and some of the seats in the second row by constables in uniform. The audience, of about 200 persons, consisted of college students mainly, and some theosophists and lawyers. Miss Gmeiner said encouraging words to me about my debut on the public platform. The next day I came across Bowring, the Superintendent of Police, while I was on my way to a court next to which was his office. He greeted me and remarked: "You spoke well, but there was a lot of blood in your speech." I laughed and said: "So, the reference to the artist's heart blood was not to your liking." "It was a strong speech", he repeated.

In the courts I was averse to the prevalent use of old-time expressions implying self-abasement, such as *huzoor* (your majestic honour) and "I humbly submit". I preferred the reciprocal attitude of respect between the Bench and the Bar which was sought to be maintained in England. I heard in the Bar Room about an Irishman, recently come to Delhi as an Additional District Magistrate, who--though a good Catholic and not a bad Magistrate--had the habit of describing as 'silly' any questions or remarks of counsel which appeared to him to be irrelevant. None of the seniors had pulled up the magistrate. I promised to choke him off if I got a brief in his court. The opportunity was not long in coming. I appeared in his court to defend an accused whom an uncle of mine, appearing for the Police, was prosecuting. It was a case of embezzlement, and the magistrate lost his temper with my uncle for not being able to name a certain section of the procedure with promptitude. He was an old man, and if nothing else his age entitled him to respectful treatment. When my turn came and I rose to cross-examine a witness, the Magistrate suddenly commented on a question, "That is silly." I immediately put down my brief, and told him: "I am aware of no such expression in law. A question can be relevant or irrelevant, and you have a right to rule out an irrelevant question. But I will not have the word silly. I insist on mutual courtesy between the Bench

and the Bar, and I want this word withdrawn." The magistrate's face fell, but after muttering something to the effect that it was not intended to imply discourtesy, he tried to save the face of authority by adding in a louder voice: "There is no occasion for losing your temper; you are still young, and it is only the beginning of your career." I would have none of this condescension, and snapped back: "Though young, I am old enough to look after my interests, and will not tolerate discourtesy." My uncle sitting by my side was alarmed by my impetuosity, and tugged at my coat to warn me. The magistrate struck a compromise by saying, "All right, go on." I was not fully appeased, but took it as amounting to an assurance that there would be no more discourtesy and went on with the case without any further interference from the court. He was cured of his habit.

On the literary side, at this time, I was writing mainly for Urdu magazines. To one I gave my translation of Tagore's *Chitra*, and to two others I was contributing what in those days was reckoned as 'new writing'. I was introducing the love stories of Aspasia and Sappho, the art of Pavlova and her swan dance--drawing attention to the neglect and the degraded status of our own devotees of Terpsichore, and writing stories based on common life (the 'Florist' for instance) and poems on such strange themes as 'The Bird that Tormented its Cage'. I have yet to collect together the harvest of this early efflorescence. It was a period of much new reading too. I had been a total stranger to Hindu philosophy so far. Jarret and Blochmann's translation of Abulfazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* introduced me to it. I was fascinated, and thirsted for more.

When Mrs. Besant launched her Home Rule movement in 1916, her theosophist disciples threw themselves heart and soul into it. Among them was Miss Gmeiner. She established first a Reading Room, and then a branch of the Home Rule League in Delhi. This earned her the disapproval of the authorities, and the strong police presence at Polak's meeting was an early expression of their intimidating vigilance. She was eventually sent for by Malcolm (later Lord) Hailey, the Chief Commissioner of Delhi, to be talked out of her political activity. A more determined, courageous and spirited person Hailey had not encountered till then. He committed the indiscretion of telling her that, after all, he held the 'hilt-end of the knife', and if she declined to refrain from politics the Government aid to the educational institution of which she was the Principal would be cut off. She firmly declined to obey the ukase, and the school--though it had nothing to do with her politics--lost its aid. It spelt a financial crisis. The Committee of Management stood by the Principal. By this time I had launched my journalistic ferry not only as the Delhi correspondent of the *Bombay Chronicle* but as a frequent contributor to two other dailies, the *Leader* of Allahabad and the *Tribune* of Lahore. I took up the cudgels on behalf of the Indraprastha School and 'the decencies of public life', and

wrote a number of scathing articles in the three newspapers. Horniman and Syud Hosain took up the issue editorially and 'Haileyism' was added to the vocabulary of political polemics. The campaign by the *Chronicle* brought a generous response from the public of Bombay and Gujarat and, together with local donations, the Committee of the school's management secured donations to the tune of more than twenty thousand rupees. This gave the school a new life and it learnt to stand on its own legs.

My first experience of addressing an audience in my mother tongue came about this time. At a largely attended public meeting I was suddenly called upon by the chairman, Hakim Ajmal Khan--who had by now lined up with progressive politics--to interpret the English speech of one of the leaders into Urdu. It had to be done, according to the speaker's desire, sentence by sentence. I did not know how I would acquit myself, but despite my initial uneasiness I not only did well but discovered myself in the process. My voice, vocabulary and fluency drew acclaim. I was entrusted with moving the next resolution, about the Hailey-Gmeiner episode. I rose with confidence, and in my impromptu maiden speech in Urdu I disregarded the restraints of those days and characterised the Chief Commissioner's action as an act of folly. The audience applauded me to the echo. I knew, now, what was wrong with our public life. It was not the people who lacked the spirit of self-assertion.

This incident had an interesting sequel. Two days later I received a letter from Mr. (later Sir) Geoffrey De Montmorency, Personal Assistant to the Chief Commissioner, inviting me for an interview. Hailey had gone on a visit to Simla and Montmorency met me as the Acting Chief Commissioner. He was a gentleman, received me standing and gave me a chair by his side in his office. Gently opening the subject, he wondered whether I could not have conveyed what I meant by a periphrasis for the word *himaqat* which I was, according to the official report, said to have used in relation to the Chief Commissioner and which according to the dictionary meant 'idiocy'. Was it not too strong an expression to be employed in polite speech? Would I withdraw it when I next spoke in public? I pointed out that the correct meaning of the word was 'unwisdom' or 'folly'.

I was one of the first six persons including Ansari who joined the Delhi branch of Mrs. Besant's Home Rule League. The Reading Room opened by the League attracted the attention of the authorities. Policemen or their agents in plain clothes began to infest the place, inconveniencing genuine visitors and even scaring away the timid. I fired off another broadside in the Press. The *Chronicle* had stinging comments on the Delhi Police for trying to "crowd out genuine readers", and other newspapers also took up the issue. I had some or other such act of the administration to comment upon almost every week.

Side by side, the Home Rule League held frequent public meetings to

ventilate grievances and carry on educative political propaganda for self-government. In Lala Shankarlal the League found an indefatigable Secretary to succeed Miss Gmeiner. While he looked after organisational work, I became the League's star turn. I had caught the imagination of the people with a style of speaking rather my own. A speech would consist of four or five points, each of which was developed to a culmination that was summed up in a Persian or Urdu couplet from a master, at which the audience would burst into cheers. It was a style particularly suited to the temperament of Urdu-knowing audiences. Meetings swelled to thousands, sometimes as many as 30,000. It seemed as if a new spirit was released and Delhi was becoming politically conscious.

When Mrs. Besant and some of her colleagues were interned by the Government, an intense agitation was launched by the Home Rule League. I was invited to address meetings outside Delhi. But I accepted only a few such engagements since it meant expense and time. Work at the Bar could not be neglected beyond a point; it had to be kept up for the wherewithal from day to day. I did not encourage the steady small work which is the life-blood of a junior's practice. I demanded good fees and accepted only the comparatively well-paid briefs.

In the later half of 1917 the Home Rule League organised meetings on the occasion of Dusserah and Muharram, which happened to fall together. I was the principal speaker. My Dussehra speech followed the familiar line of argument. Ram was the soul of honour and truth, and the symbol of India's spirit of freedom. Sita was the personification of purity and devotion, which the satanic Ravan tried to eclipse by his deceitful abduction. Ravan's defeat was the symbolic rescue of India's honour by the forces of truth and freedom. The next day came my Muharram speech, and the story of Karbala. Hosain was the soul of truth, and Yazid the incarnation of satanic forces. Untruth and brute force might crush and butcher the body, but the blood of martyrs would blossom forth season after season, in powerful forces which would sweep the tyrants into disgrace and oblivion. This proved a little too strong a dose for the police; they hired some bad characters to overawe me. The very next day reports were brought to me before my departure for the court that I should not leave the house because knots of angry persons had gathered outside. They were denouncing me for my Muharram speech. "But why?", I asked. "They say that you referred to the martyrdom of Hosain as 'murder'." This was a subtle point which only a criminal mind could hit upon in order to rouse credulous fanatics. The word 'murder' did occur in my speech, but it was in a couplet by Mohammad Ali, the hero of the day. His lines said: "The murder of Hosain was really the death of Yazid. Islam revives after every Karbala." I dismissed the threat as unworthy of notice, and got into my cabriolet to go to the court. I did see some groups of people opposite my

house, and noticed their ugly mood.

As I turned into the court compound, I saw the Deputy Superintendent of Police near the treasury opposite the Bar Room, and suddenly a man in tattered clothes ran out of nowhere and chucked his old, torn shoes, one after the other, at me. Neither of the missiles struck me, but dropped at my feet after hitting the hood of the chaise. I drew up my trap before the Bar Room, but the assailant ran back and disappeared. I saw a sardonic smile on the police officer's face. For a while I was angry, and consulted the President of the Bar, an old, kindly and experienced man of the world. He quoted a saying in Urdu, 'Who should take notice of an insult bawled out in a public place?', and said to me: "Forget about it. This is only a recognition of your public activity. The police can be up to any tricks."

News of the Secretary of State, E.M. Montagu's visit to India in November 1917 roused certain leading and respectable citizens of Delhi, not belonging to the Home Rule League, to unwonted activity. A Citizens' Association that had been defunct was revived, and it was urged that it would be a good thing if Delhi spoke with one voice. Several leading men met and appointed a sub-committee to draft an address to be presented to Montagu. I was made a member of the sub-committee, perhaps because I was believed to have drafting skill. After many attempts in the sub-committee the final draft was left to me, but I was directed to retain 'the demands of Delhi' formulated by the others. I had no stomach for these footling local demands. But since I could do what I liked with the preamble of the address, I worked into it a reference to Delhi as "the cradle and the grave of mighty empires", and the hope of the termination of India's nonage. My draft was finally passed, and I heaved a sigh of relief. Left to myself I would have urged self-determination and full self-government--complete independence was a later cry, not yet in vogue. But Delhi's leading lights (not the common citizens who made up our audiences) were more concerned with their municipality than with larger problems.

On the release of Mrs. Besant she was designated as the President of the next Congress to be held in Calcutta in December 1917. Our Home Rule League group made preparations for participating in the Congress. Sultan Singh and Pearey Lal invited me to go to Calcutta and stay with them. These well-to-do friends were helping the Indraprastha School and the Home Rule League liberally, and were also assisting in building up Shankarlal's Swadeshi Stores. But I was not satisfied with our going to the Calcutta Congress merely as casual delegates. We ought to be attending Congress sessions as accredited representatives of a Delhi branch of the Indian National Congress. I even made bold to suggest that the next session, in 1918, might be held in Delhi. I shared my thoughts and hopes with Shankarlal, Sultan Singh and Peareylal. I urged them to establish a regular branch of the Congress in Delhi. And, since the venue of the next

session is decided at each annual meeting, I wanted them to extend an invitation, at Calcutta, for the thirty-third session of the Congress, due in December 1918, to be held in Delhi. In urging this on my friends, I pointed out that never in the history of the Congress had a session been held in Delhi – now the capital of the alien and autocratic government. Nothing short of an invasion of the citadel by the national organisation would shake the wooden mind of the bureaucracy. The Government had shifted its capital to Delhi, among other reasons, in the hope of obtaining a respite from Calcutta's political heat. But they must be made to know that the political awakening and the nationalist forces would pursue them wherever they might be, and would give them no rest.

If the Congress was to meet in Delhi, there were two challenges to be met: workers, and money. As for the immense preparatory work that would be necessary, the Home Rule League had built a body of fine volunteers. But money had to be found by the moneyed. It would be necessary to muster donations amounting to a lakh of rupees to begin with, and the total expenditure might go up to anything between two and three lakhs. Sultan Singh, who would have to bear the brunt, was hesitant and still undecided when we left for Calcutta.

This was my first visit to that city, and indeed to Bengal, and it was my first Congress. I had stayed away from the sessions of 1915 and 1916, for I was under a heavy cloud of suspicion, thanks to Mohammad Ali. But between 1916 and 1917 I had, through more than sixteen months of writing and public speaking, contributed my share to stirring up the sleepy hollow that was Delhi, which was now in tune with the most advanced political ideas of the day. I had thereby earned the right to enter the sacred precincts of the national organisation.

Calcutta was a revelation to me. In parts it presented the look of western cities. A century and a half of British presence had gone into its growth as the capital of three-fourths of the British Empire. Delhi appeared a suburban settlement by comparison. But the 'native' quarters of the poor in Calcutta were squalid. Tucked away in the Indian section of the higher class was Tagore's ancestral house, 'Jorasanko', which meant so much to me.

Construction of the *pandal* or improvised theatre in which the Congress was to meet was nearing completion. It was a poor looking affair, though of immense dimensions designed to seat some 15,000 persons. All of them, according to the style of those days borrowed from England, had to be provided with chairs or benches. By the opening day, the *pandal* was gaily decorated with Home Rule League flags and bunting. As we were thinking of inviting the Congress to Delhi, my colleagues and I tried to study the working of the Reception Committee and the entire gamut of arrangements. Peareylal secured three Reception Committee tickets for

himself, me and Sultan Singh in order to get seats on the dais. We managed to keep as near the rostrum as possible, for there were no loudspeakers those days.

Sarladevi Choudhrani and C.R. Das's sister Urmila Devi had got up a remarkable orchestra, with a band of men and women of leading families, including the Maharaja of Nattore. The *pandal* was packed to capacity with delegates and visitors. Most of the leaders were in fashionable European costume and hats. Only Tilak was in a dhoti; he was wearing Mahratha dress. The Congress opened with the national song, *Bande Mataram*. The entire audience rose, and in the hush of almost devotional silence the strains of the chorus and the band rose and filled the air. It was a moment of soul-stirring solemnity. My eyes filled with tears. Insignificant, and of no account individually, I was also a note in this grand orchestration of human aspiration.

The proceedings began with the address of the chairman of the reception committee. The formal election of the President was moved, seconded, and supported by a representative from each province. I heard Surendranath Banerjee for the first time. His rhetorical periods ebbed and flowed in a well modulated voice. B.C. Pal roared like a lion, and Mrs. Naidu sang her words with a lilt. Tilak spoke in a voice of almost no volume or timbre. He was not heard, but was uproariously cheered. The presidential address of Mrs. Besant was a masterly survey, replete with facts and figures.

After hearing the other speeches the next day, I saw no reason why I should not speak. I sent in my name, and my turn came when the resolution about the Repression (internment of the Ali Brothers and others) came up. I welcomed this, for I thought it would be a good return for the unmerited calumny for me to support this resolution. I walked to the rostrum with an eager and firm step. So far, only three or four persons including B.C. Pal and Mrs. Naidu had made themselves heard in the back benches and I was certain that my voice would carry to the last row. I spoke in Urdu for a brief ten minutes, and earned repeated cheers. When I was returning to my seat the Maharaja of Nattore, not known to me before, stopped me and after an enthusiastic embrace said: "It was a treat to hear you." He was a scholar of Persian and a lover of Urdu, a nobleman of the old culture. Shiv Prasad Gupta, who was a champion of Hindustani and did not like English spoken in the national assembly, complimented me on sticking to Urdu.

In between the sittings of the Congress some private gatherings were arranged. Halder, a brother-in-law of Maya Ray (now Maya Banerjee), who had heard about me from her and had been impressed by my speech, invited me to his party. There I met M.R. Jayakar for the first time. I also went across the road to see Maya and her husband. By the concluding day Sultan Singh had, after all, been persuaded to invite the Congress to hold



its next annual session in Delhi. The invitation was accepted, and we returned to Delhi feeling triumphant and full of zeal. Our first task was to found the Delhi branch of the Congress. It was not difficult, for we could convert the members of the Home Rule League into Congress members. But it was necessary to draw in many more. A meeting was called at Sultan Singh's palatial house, to which were invited a number of senior as well as rising lawyers. Several of them responded.

The work of enrolling members and volunteers, and raising funds, had to be extended beyond the limits of Delhi. I was included in a group which went to Meerut for the purpose, and addressed a public meeting there. I reminded the audience that the relationship between Delhi and Meerut rested on the historic events of 1857, when the war of liberation was started by Meerut, and Delhi fought for it and lost. The interval of some sixty years was only the twinkling of an eye, and the country was now reassembling under the national flag to march forward to freedom.

Not long after my return from Calcutta the strain of work began to tell on me. Rauf was also ailing, and the two of us took a vacation and went to stay at the Kutab for a fortnight. We filled our time with long walks among the ruins, exploring the successive strata of the archaeological remains of at least three of the early Delhis--of Prithviraj, the Ghoris and the Aibaks or slave kings. We also read Plato together. In the evenings we would go to the grassy square before Balban's and Altamash's tombs, and carry on our Socratic discussion. Now it was Charmides or Symposium, and now Phaedrus or Timaeus. I was Asafoes, and he was incongruously Raufotie. Sometimes Peareylal and a few other friends from Delhi joined us in the calm setting. Spring was at its height, and the dry and scented air of Kutab was itself an ecstasy.

Life flowed in a smooth and even channel till one day Rauf and I drifted into a heated argument over agnosticism. Rauf was in a stubborn mood of total denial, and would not let his reason give way to imagination beyond the boundaries of the senses. I was not satisfied with the limited guidance of the five senses. The mind seemed to me to possess something which was as unlike the direct contribution of the senses as is a drop of water unlike the hydrogen and oxygen which go into its making. And this sixth sense was, it seemed to me, the source of metaphysical perception. I regarded myself as one who could see beyond the sense boundary. But to Rauf this was a delusion. We argued and quarrelled, and for half an hour we were struck dumb as if we were alienated for good. Then I turned to him and said: "Rauf, what will they say if we return to Delhi as two fools who argued about the existence of God and ruined their friendship?" The tension was over. He smiled and said that I had only spoken his thought. On my return to the city I threw myself heart and soul into my work as publicist through the platform and the Press. The authorities reacted

adversely. The police began to employ paid disturbers of meetings. Such elements were promptly shut up by the audience. The next tactic of the police agents was to stand on the outskirts and chuck stones into the gathering. This was too much, and some of the offenders were manhandled by the public. The district authorities made this an excuse for banning all meetings 'in places of public resort' without the previous permission of the police. This was a big blow, but we were not going to take it lying down. I looked up the law and found that the order was *ultra vires*. We could go to a court of law, but meanwhile we had to carry on with our public meetings. And we would not go to the police for permission. The first meeting after this order was therefore convened outside the limits of the lilliputian province of Delhi, across the river Jamuna.

Towards the end of April 1918 the Viceroy called a War Conference, which was attended among others by Gandhiji. Mrs. Naidu was also in Delhi at the time, but received no invitation to the War Conference--she was only a poet. We arranged that both she and Gandhiji should address a public meeting. We had to hire a theatre, because it was a point of honour with us not to go to the police for permission to hold an open-air meeting. I went to see Mrs. Naidu at the Maidens Hotel where she was staying, and when we came into the hall, we saw Charles Andrews who was going out after meeting someone in the hotel. Sarojini asked him whether his 'old man' was going to address the meeting in Hindustani. Andrews said yes. Sarojini doubted whether it was advisable, since Gandhiji did not know Urdu and the Delhi audience would be critical. Andrews felt certain that Gandhiji would make an impression: "My old man will win through, you may be sure." But Mrs. Naidu was apprehensive. It was a risky experiment. It would be a crowded meeting, loudspeakers were not known, and they had never heard Gandhiji before.

Wearing home-spun clothes and rural turban Gandhiji spoke in broken Hindustani. He employed some expressions, perhaps derived from Gujarati, in a sense totally different from the way they were understood in Delhi and which, if used by any other person, would have tickled the audience to a titter. For nearly thirty minutes he held the attention of his listeners. I remember telling my friends, "This is the eloquence of sincerity." Neither fine phrasing, rounded periods nor all the tricks of the art of rhetoric can produce the effect of words spoken from the heart. The forecast of Andrews proved correct. Gandhiji was known at that time as a moderate and therefore the Tilakites, and our advanced Home Rule wing in Delhi which was Tilakite, regarded him as an honest, self-sacrificing crank, but not a politician of any mark.

I was maintaining a close association with some members of the Imperial Council, for whom I used to draft interpellations. For one or two of them I had been preparing parts of, or entire, speeches--manuscript oratory

being permissible in those days. I was thus ventilating Delhi's problems in the legislature too. An honourable member who was wealthy, and whose speeches used to be brought to me for revision and occasional redrafting, used to recompense me with gifts – sometimes of a hundred rupee note. My journalistic work was not ill paid either. When I wrote for both the *Chronicle* and the *Independent*, my monthly earnings used to be between two hundred and fifty and four hundred rupees. This was opportune, because I was neglecting my work at the Bar.

By June 1918 the momentum of our platform propaganda had shattered the nerves of the Delhi administration. Pandit Neki Ram Sharma of Bhiwani, a powerful orator, had joined us and had won the heart of Delhi audiences. I was bad enough for the rulers, and now Pandit Neki Ram doubled the force of the broadsides. Hailey decided to gag us. The two of us were to address a meeting to appeal for volunteers for the coming Congress session, when we were served with notices under the Defence of India Act (corresponding to the Defence of the Realm Act of England). The notices, over Hailey's signature, said that we were "not to address any public meetings" within Delhi province. Both of us went to the site of the scheduled gathering and received an enthusiastic ovation, but sat out the meeting without opening our lips. Those who spoke made capital out of it. Every time reference was made to our 'dumb speakers', cheers burst forth from the public.

I detected a loophole in Hailey's order. It related to public meetings, not private gatherings. My considered legal view was that I was free to address members of the Home Rule League indoors if admission to the meeting was confined to them. An announcement was made to the effect that a meeting of members would be addressed by Pandit Neki Ram and myself, and that members would be enrolled at the gate of the building that was the venue. Some of my lawyer friends, while agreeing with my construction of the order, deprecated my experiment. They thought it was not lawyer-like to court prosecution in order to test a point. But I was not taking this step merely as a lawyer but more as a citizen solicitous for the preservation of civil rights. The announcement created a sensation. I requested my friends Miss Gmeiner, Shankar Lal and his band of workers to be punctilious about the arrangements and to see that none who was not a member of the Home Rule League was admitted to the meeting.

Our 'private meeting' was conducted strictly on these lines, the rules being enforced by the Home Rule League's volunteer corps commanded by Pandit Shiv Narain Haksar, one of the finest men it has been my good fortune to be associated with. Several hundred new members were enrolled at the gate, and the audience of more than a thousand consisted of old and new members. Some of them, as we learnt later, were policemen in plain clothes. The meeting went off successfully.

## The Asaf Ali Trial

Two days later I was arrested for disobeying the Chief Commissioner's order. The very Kotwal (Deputy Superintendent of Police) whom I had suspected of organising the assault on me in the court compound, mentioned earlier, came to my house with the warrant of arrest. I was filled with a strange feeling of elation. This was my baptism, and I could not henceforth be denied the genuineness of my credentials. I dashed off a Press message. Then I went down to say goodbye to my mother. She had heard the news, and I found her seated—tense but seemingly calm and dignified. Other relations in the house were in an agitated and nervous state. My mother rose and, holding me in her embrace, said in a choked voice and with tears in her eyes: "You are my only child. Did I bring you up for this day? May God protect you."

The news of my arrest spread in the city with speed. The Kotwal took me to the Central Police Station, and informed me on the way that I was going to be produced before the Court that very day. Rauf met me at the Police Station and proceeded to the Bar Room to arrange for the appearance of some lawyer friends. When I was taken to the District Magistrate's Court, I found the compound full of active members of the Home Rule League. They greeted me with the national cries of the day, 'Allaho Akbar' and 'Bande Mataram'. The police warned the people that the District Magistrate did not want any noise. Admission to the Court was restricted, but even so the room was packed with lawyer friends who wanted it to be known that the Bar was behind me.

Col. Beadon, the Deputy Commissioner, quickly passed an order of release on a bail of Rs.2000 and personal recognisance of the same amount, and adjourned the case to a later date. This was somewhat of a disappointment to me, since it took the elation of martyrdom down by many pegs. My friends and colleagues immediately arranged the bail and personal bond for appearance, and as I walked out I was garlanded and snowed under rose-petals. Neki Ram, who was not in Delhi at the time, voluntarily surrendered himself after a couple of days and was similarly released on bail and hailed by the public as a hero.

Now began the preparation for a forensic duel, and journalistic propaganda to fight out the issue. Beadon provided the first target, for an inspection of the record of the case showed that while passing the order for arrest he had unwisely allowed himself to observe (before arrest and trial) that, with a war on, the Defence of India Act was the most important measure on the statute book, and any infraction should be met with "condign punishment". Quite possibly it was an intimidatory device to bend me and my co-accused into an apology. I pitched on Beadon's indiscretion and made capital out of it in the Press. Horniman and Syud took up the cudgels and the *Chronicle* made the 'Asaf Ali Trial' a cause celebre. I issued a statement

exposing the immediate reason for the action taken against me. The blow, I said, was aimed at the Congress.

Beadon had ruled himself out by his order, and a Magistrate was imported from the North West Frontier District to try the case. The Special Magistrate was a Mr. George Hemming Spence (now Sir George Spence, Secretary of the Law Department of the Government of India, who and I were for several years fellow members of the Central Legislative Assembly). The nationalists of Bombay led by the *Chronicle* formed a Defence Committee and raised funds to engage a leading counsel to conduct the defence. A Defence Committee was organised in Delhi too, and as Neki Ram belonged to the Tilak school of thought, two Poona lawyers were deputed by the Tilak League to join forces with us. Bombay sent 'Jack' Davar and M K. Azad to lead the defence on the first hearing. Mine and Neki Ram's cases were separated for technical reasons.

Beadon's observation lent point to our grievance that the Delhi administration was acting spitefully against me because of the nearly two years of scathing criticism voiced by me. We decided to apply for a transfer of the case to some other province. Meanwhile I was receiving telegrams from many quarters conveying congratulations, sympathy and support. Among them were Mrs. Besant, President of the Congress, and Hassan Imam, President-designate of the special session of the Congress convened for August or September in Bombay (he had become very popular those days because he had resigned his six months old judgeship of the Calcutta High Court.) Horniman's message was characteristic and ended with: "Stick to your guns." The *Chronicle* wanted a verbatim report of the Court proceedings, and the Defence Committee engaged the leading stenographer Manker on Rs.100 per day. He came with Davar.

The first hearing was brief, for Davar applied for a transfer, argued his point with vigour and got a fortnight's adjournment. The case had opened with a breeze. When the Magistrate was asked to provide chairs for the accused, he swayed with anger and said: "I have never heard of accused being given chairs." It was a point for agitation by the Press, and during the following hearings we did get chairs. The case lasted from June to August. The application for transfer was first drafted by me, then redrafted by Horniman and formally 'settled' by Davar. It contained pungent extracts from my contributions to the *Chronicle*, where I had charged the Delhi administration with disgraceful despotism, Nadirshahi, etc. These, it was maintained, were grounds enough for a reasonable apprehension that no courts in Delhi would be immune from a pre-conceived prejudice. The application had to go to the Government of India. Davar ran up for the purpose to Simla. There he incidentally discussed this case with the then Law Member, Sir George Lowndes, whom I had known personally in Bombay. The Government of India rejected our transfer application.

On his return from Simla, Davar--a charming and cheerful fellow, tall and well built and full of anecdotes--appeared to be in a grave mood. He told me the gist of his conversation with Lowndes. The Law Member was of opinion that my conviction was certain, and the punishment would be exemplary. Perhaps as long as three years, which would be followed by disbarring. "If you were my younger brother," Davar said, "my advice to you would be: why not say 'I am sorry for it'? I have it from a high authority (meaning Lowndes) that it will end the case." Davar was in right earnest and said that I was young, with the whole of my life before me. What would I do when I came out of the prison after three years, with my health and my profession gone? Sit under a pipal tree with a begging bowl? It was all right for the Tilaks and the Mrs. Besants, whom the people supported with hundreds of thousands and showered gifts on. "Who will look at you, my boy?", Davar asked. Even M.K. Azad, who was present, was moved to say something in support of the suggestion. I listened to Davar in silence but my whole soul was opposed to it. I might as well commit suicide. Davar perhaps saw how my mind was working, and advised me to consult my friends. I invited three or four of them to hear Davar. After he had finished reiterating what he had told me, their opinion was invited. With the exception of Rauf they seemed to endorse Davar's advice. Rauf said: "Even if I considered it advisable, I know he will not do it." I was delighted, and turning to Davar I thanked him with all my heart, for he meant well, but told him that I was prepared for the worst consequences but would not yield. At this Davar sprang up with a bright light in his eyes and said: "Well, my boy, then I will do my best for you." We sat down to study the brief. Davar had his own method of work. He waved aside my written brief, running into several quires, and began to take down his own notes after questioning me on facts. I have followed that method myself, all my life. "Master your facts by instruction and marshal them yourself according to the line of procedure emerging from them, look up your own law, and check your junior's work." This is the sound way. But I have found some of the ablest seniors I have worked with one-sided, often relying more on advocacy than on accuracy. It is risky. To flounder in facts is worse by far than to trip in law. However, this is a parenthetical remark.

The case was proceeded with in a packed court. The *Chronicle* carried banner-headlines and the verbatim report filled several columns. Charge was framed, and I pleaded 'most emphatically not guilty'. Cross-examination, defence evidence and arguments carried us to a date in August. I filed a lengthy statement which, considering that the Congress was pegged to protestations of 'humble loyalty to the throne' till a year afterwards, was considered somewhat truculent. Some of the 'rash' expressions and sentences were struck off by Davar. Syud had come to Delhi to be present on

the concluding day, and to see me off if it came to that. Judgment was reserved and an inspection of the meeting place fixed by the Magistrate. At last Spence delivered a lengthy and able judgment. He marshalled the prosecution evidence, examined the defence evidence in an impartial spirit, and narrowed down the issue to a point where conviction and acquittal seemed to hover on the borderline. In his final argument he found the local government's order inadequate to stop the loophole of which advantage had been taken. He held that even if the conduct of the accused was 'contumacious', he had no alternative to acquitting. The decision was a great triumph for us. We were wildly cheered and garlanded, and walked on a carpet of rose-petals in the court compound. And I suddenly became well known in the country.

All triumphs in life partake of the nature of the elusive stuff of which happiness is made. Happiness quickly enters the congealed memory of the past, leaving the spirit to face new trials. Every tide subsides after touching the high water mark, and recedes with a swiftness which leaves one wondering whether the earlier experience was not a mere dream. Some of my colleagues saw in the *Chronicle's* highlighting of the 'Asaf Ali Trial'--in which I could not have had a hand since the editorial policy was beyond me--an attempt on my part to exclude my co-accused from the credit. The *Chronicle* also brought out the proceedings of the trial in the shape of a book of some 200 pages, with a photograph of mine in wig and gown taken the day after my call to the Bar in London and a write-up on me by Syud. This was also held against me.

Soon afterwards Hakim Ajmal Khan Sahib wanted me to help him with the cause which was central to his life-work, namely securing recognition of the legitimacy of the indigenous systems of medicine, the Ayurvedic and the Unani Tibbi. The alien government had introduced the allopathic system and set its face against the indigenous systems whose materia medica and clinical experience extended over some 25 centuries. Hakim Sahib, who had so far succeeded in maintaining a college of indigenous medicine with private support, managed to secure through the initiative of two Indian members of the Imperial Council the passage of a resolution which urged this recognition. The Central Government had addressed all Provincial Governments on the subject to ascertain their views, and copies of these comments had been communicated to Hakim Sahib. He now wanted me to deal with them in a well-reasoned memorandum to be given to the Government. He further desired me to write a brief pamphlet in support of the cause, for he intended to bring up this question at the forthcoming session of the Congress in Delhi.

I frankly confessed both my ignorance of the subject and an instinctive hesitation to defend a medical system which, I thought, was 'scientific' only by courtesy. After all, had not both the Ayurvedic and Unani systems

fallen behind the times? Hakim Sahib was a model of patience. Even a strong opposition would not ruffle his temper. He began by saying that he would be content if I translated his views on the subject. And then he suggested that I might modify my instinctive hesitation if I acquired some familiarity with the subject. I readily agreed to read up whatever he suggested, and he gave some tips. I got hold of the books he named, and articles in the Encyclopaedia, and gobbled them up. I found ample material for the memorandum and the pamphlet. Much of my ignorance was dispelled, and I appreciated Hakim Sahib's effort to revitalise and modernise these systems which had a natural and popular place in India's economy and deserved to be helped by the State. But I was unhappy with the dogmatic approach of the general run of practitioners of the indigenous systems, and had my doubts about some of the assumptions underlying the systems. And so, while I drafted a lengthy memorandum replying forcefully to the superficial and glaringly prejudiced opinions of the Provincial Governments, and produced a pamphlet putting forward a plea for indigenous medicine, I placed my doubts before Hakim Sahib. He was pleased with the memorandum and the pamphlet and graciously engaged me, a mere layman, in a discussion of my objections. Hakim Sahib had a progressive mind, and was eager to apply the discoveries of modern science to the correction and improvement of the old systems which, after having reached a high standard of clinical observation and treatment, had languished due to lack of State patronage and of research.

### **First Delhi Congress**

I was devoting myself to my profession, to journalism and such work of the Congress Reception Committee as was entrusted to me. The Chairman of the Committee was yet to be elected, and the preparatory work was being done through sub-committees. I was put on two of them, dealing with propaganda and with the drafting of resolutions. In those days the Subjects Committee of a Congress session would start its work on the basis of draft resolutions prepared by the Reception Committee.

Rai Bahadur Sultan Singh, who could be a formidable candidate for chairmanship of the Reception Committee, stepped aside in favour of Hakimji. But a section headed by some lawyers wanted to put up Rai Sahib Pearey Lal (different from my friend of the same name who was a business man), as the oldest Congressman and leader of the Delhi Bar. They carried on brisk canvassing, and even gave it a communal slant. Their argument was that an overwhelming majority of Congress members were Hindus and nearly all the money had been contributed by them. It was also held against Hakimji that he was not fluent in English. But the Home Rule League section was firmly for Hakimji. There was hardly a Hindu



household in Delhi which was not indebted to Hakimji's family, for he and his brothers and ancestors had treated Hindus and Muslims, free and alike, for nearly a century. Hakimji was a public benefactor in everyone's eyes. Moreover, he had switched over to progressive politics. His final break with the official world had been hastened by of his being chairman of the meeting at which I had characterised the Chief Commissioner's penalising of Miss Gmeiner's school as an act of folly. I had it from Hakim Sahib himself that when he happened to meet Hailey somewhere soon after that meeting, the Chief Commissioner had complained about it.

Till the day of the Reception Committee's meeting for electing the Chairman we were not quite certain whether a contest would be avoided. Babu Pearey Lal finally decided that Hakimji should not be opposed. The election was therefore unanimous. It must be noted with gratification that the Hindus of Delhi acted wisely and generously. They did not yield to the communal clamour. As for presidentship of the first Delhi Congress, though Tilak and B.C. Pal were forbidden to enter Delhi and the Punjab, Tilak had been initially chosen. But since Tilak decided to go to England in order to prosecute Valentine Chirol for defamation in the course of that Englishman's book on 'The Indian Unrest', Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya was elected.

As the Congress week drew near, the Government's nerves began to give way. They cast about to find a way to reassert and demonstrate their power. No sooner had the Reception Committee published its programme of according the leaders and the President-designate an impressive welcome and taking them out in a procession, the Government issued a communique practically banning processions and public demonstrations. We were faced with the alternatives of abandoning the presidential procession or defying the restriction. The 'responsible elders' and the shining lights of the Reception Committee were for pocketing the insult, but the 'hotheads', as the Home Rule League section of Shankarlal and his followers were known, urged defiance. The final decision was left to the President-designate.

I was among those who went to Ghaziabad--two stops before Delhi -- to receive Malaviyaji and to inform him about the situation as regards the procession. He deplored the Government's interference with the citizens' liberty, but decided that there should be no defiance. He received a big ovation at the Delhi railway station, and made a short speech from his motor car to the large gathering of citizens in the square in front of the station. Even this was, in a technical sense, a violation of the order about meetings in places of public resort. But the authorities did not dare to take exception to it. Those who were for defiance were satisfied with this token of assertion.

Mrs. Besant, the President of the expiring year, had arrived the previous

day. I went to see her, and showed her the draft resolutions of the Reception Committee. I had included among them one urging the extension of Delhi Province and giving it a Legislative Council and a High Court of its own. It was a 'bee in my bonnet', and I have continued to cherish this dream. Had my scheme of carving the Ambala Division--which has a predominantly Hindu population--out of the Punjab and joining it to Delhi been accepted, I have little doubt that much of the communal trouble of the last quarter of a century would have been avoided.

I was also keen on another resolution whose acceptance might have made a considerable difference to the course of events. The draft resolution urged that the provision laid down in the Congress Constitution of the time, by which communal questions were excluded from consideration if objected to by a three-fourths majority of the delegates of the community present, should be incorporated in the constitution for the country that was envisaged under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. Mrs. Besant observed that this was 'purely consequential', for it was already there in the constitution of the National Parliament (the Congress). I was happy with her reaction, and felt certain that I would succeed in the subjects committee with both these resolutions.

However, when the time came for the election of members of the Subjects Committee by the provincial delegations, I was left out. I was not only a mere youngster, but was still suspect in the eyes of some. So the Congress came and went leaving me where I was. Had fate been kinder, and had I had a straight journey through life, perhaps I could have begun to play a more effective part in the public life of the country from the time of the Delhi Congress of 1918.

### **Anti-Rowlatt Satyagraha**

The year 1919 opened a new phase in India's political development. One of the two Bills which emerged from the Rowlatt Report--and which were known in the country as the Black Bills--was passed by the Imperial Council despite vigorous opposition. Gandhiji immediately announced his intention to organise a Satyagraha campaign.

The term Satyagraha and its scope were wholly new in the public life of the country. Civil resistance was a familiar term. It had been considered in 1917 though not pursued (in view of the visit to India that the Secretary of State, Mr. Montagu, volunteered to undertake). I remember reading Henry David Thoreau at the time in order to grasp the implications of civil or passive resistance. That seemed to me a legitimate political sanction, deriving from what Dicey called 'inherent sanction' in his book on English Constitutional Law which I had read during my student days. Dicey gave

a glaring example to illustrate 'inherent sanction'. If parliament passed a law ordering the slaughter of all blue-eyed babies, none would obey such a law and the parliament would be kicked out. Civil resistance was only a rational deduction from that postulate. If a Government rode rough-shod over the inherent rights of the people, their obvious remedy was disobedience of such laws as were unbearable. But I had no idea of Satyagraha, which literally meant 'insistence on truth'.

Gandhiji came to Delhi in February 1919, soon after his announcement, and stayed with Principal Rudra. After discussion with various leaders and workers, he decided to form a Satyagraha Committee in Delhi. On the appointed day some twenty persons gathered in Gandhiji's room at Principal Rudra's house. They consisted mostly of active members of the Home Rule League, and there were some others including Swami Shradhananda. I was there, and heard Gandhiji explain what he meant by Satyagraha and what he expected Satyagrahis to do. His recital of the duties of a Satyagrahi was formidable and forbidding. The Satyagrahi must for-swear all worldly attachments, and taking his firm stand on truth, be ready in his pursuit of truth to suffer unto death. Satyagrahis should pledge themselves publicly. The smallness of their number should not weigh with them.

There was a hush after his speech. Everyone was engaged in examining his mind. Adherence to this creed of self-denudation of all worldly attachments, and self-chosen suffering of so high an order was not a matter for light-hearted announcement. So far as I can recall, Swamiji was the first to declare that he was fully prepared to pledge himself. Others followed, and the total number rose to 14. It included Shankarlal and his group. I hesitated, for I wanted time to consider it. But when I sat down afterwards to write out my copy for the Press, I had time to consider, and I included my name among those who were ready to pledge themselves to Satyagraha. I was not capable of rising to the dizzy height of renunciation and self-imposed austerity of an almost saintly order, but I decided to accept Satyagraha in the spirit of political civil resistance. And I am sure that none of the others accepted non-violence in Gandhiji's sense but recognised the need for non-violent means as being expedient in the country's situation.

As for Mussalmans any stick was good enough, for their temper was rising because of the misfortunes which were befalling Turkey in the war, and they were ready to join any movement against the British Government. An energetic, resourceful and fanatically zealous Muslim, Abdullah Churiwala (bangle selling was one of the many occupations this remarkable man was engaged in at the time) joined Shankarlal's associates. He, at any rate, was not wedded to non-violence although he was not out for any violence. A month's agitation against the Rowlatt legislation all over

the country set the stage for the first demonstration which Gandhiji announced for 30th March 1919. It was to be a hartal or general strike of work throughout the land. Hartal is a well-known Indian demonstration of protest or mourning. Gandhiji lent it a religious flavour, by suggesting that the demonstration should be accompanied by a purificatory bath and fast by those who were so inclined. There was to be a procession and a public meeting where the Black Bills (one of them now made law) were to be condemned.

Great preparations were made in Delhi for the procession and the meeting, and assurances of a complete hartal were voluntarily given by every section of trade. The date of the all-India demonstration was suddenly changed to the 6th of April, but the information came too late to stop the programme in Delhi. The dawn of 30th March 1919 witnessed the whole city on strike. The police and the local authorities were nervous, and their counter arrangements looked ominous. By eight or nine in the morning some of the volunteers led by Abdullah reached the railway station to persuade the stall-keepers to close down. This was the storm signal. One of them declined to close his shop and there was a trifling incident, when the Additional District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police arrived on the scene with a posse of police, ordered the crowd to disperse--some maintained that no such order was given--and fire was opened. I rushed to the spot and found Currie, the Additional District Magistrate and Jeffries the Superintendent of Police, and a small knot of spectators and our Home Rule League volunteers.

The hartal continued for 18 days, and in the course of it Beadon, the Deputy Commissioner, pounced upon more than a dozen of us, including Lala Peareylal, the President of the Bar, and made us all 'Special Constables'. This was clearly meant to humiliate us. Summoning us to a meeting in the Town Hall, Beadon charged us to assist the police in keeping peace. He went further and passed an order that Special Constables should attend the Police Station, wear badges, etc. We met and decided to disobey the order. It remained a dead letter.

On the sixth of April came news of the Amritsar hartal and its sequel of repression, then Gandhiji's temporary arrest at Palwal on his way to Delhi and his enforced return to Bombay, followed by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and martial law in Punjab. There were riots and firing in many parts of the country. It appeared as if India was in the throes of a revolution. Gandhiji had unconsciously lighted the fuse of a mine which had been gathering explosive force for at least three years, unobserved or grossly under-estimated by the authorities. They followed the policy of slow reform and drastic repression, instead of responding to the new spirit in a manner that could give it the right turn. Why do people want a change?

And to secure it why do they run risks involving loss of liberty, property, limb and life? They want a better society, a free life, higher standards of living, and for this they want representative government. Democracy may be less wise than extraordinary individuals who may, if in power, work wonders for a while. But no individual, even with superhuman intelligence and power to do good, can ever be a substitute for what people may do for themselves. And here in India an autocratic and foreign bureaucracy was in power, and was contemptuous of Indian talent and obstructive of the country's economic development. How could this state of affairs last? To inflict humiliation and repression on the very people whose scanty earnings were drawn upon to pay the fat salaries of their oppressors was monstrous. But the O'Dwyers and Dyers, and their Indian henchmen, thought otherwise. They converted Gandhiji's peaceful protest into a revolution of gigantic magnitude which has rolled on for twenty-five years.

On Syud Hossain moving to Allahabad as editor of the *Independent*, launched by Motilal Nehru in February 1919, I had the columns of a second daily, besides the *Bombay Chronicle*, at my disposal as their special correspondent and columnist. I also wrote now and then for other dailies and I sometimes filed as many as four to five columns by Press telegrams or by mail. Along with my journalistic activity, there were professional engagements connected with public life. The police came down on Shankarlal and some others with a charge of riot, dacoity and grievous hurt because a CID Inspector was mobbed at a public meeting at which the accused were present. The Inspector was relieved of his pistol which was taken to Dr. Ansari, who instantly handed it over to the police. Along with this came professional calls from Rohtak, where similar political trials had been started in connection with the uprooting of railway track near Bahadurgarh. I was dividing my time between Delhi and Rohtak, motoring down to Rohtak in the morning and working in Delhi for the rest of the day, and writing sheaves of press messages at all odd hours.

In between was sandwiched the Municipal election of 1919, in which I had been put up as a candidate from my ward. But Beadon, the Deputy Commissioner, scratched out my name when I was away in Rohtak during the scrutiny, holding that I was not qualified to stand as a candidate since I was a co-occupant of my mother's house and not an 'occupier' within the definition of the Municipal Act. (I have now been on the Municipal Committee for twenty-two years, ever since 1922).

My friends and I felt that we should secure the services of Chitta Ranjan Das for Shankarlal's defence. Fortunately he agreed, and arrived on the morning of the opening day of the trial. This was my first introduction to C.R. Das, and by an affinity of temperament we took to each other at once.

Another lawyer, who had worked with him before, and I went to instruct him. He noted down the facts of the case. But the time was short and the process remained incomplete. An important point turned on medical evidence, regarding the nature of the injury sustained by the Inspector. The prosecution relied on the evidence of the Viceroy's surgeon, Sir Charles Roberts, whom the complainant had consulted. I had prepared an elaborate cross-examination with the help of a specialist. The surgeon was to appear that day as witness, and although I laid the result of my preparation before Das, he left the cross-examination of this crucial witness to me. It was a conspicuous feather in my professional cap. After all I was a junior of barely seven years' standing. But C.R. Das was a large-hearted senior. I felt greatly encouraged, and my cross-examination of Sir Charles Roberts was not unworthy of the situation. Later in the course of this case I learnt much from C.R. Das's advocacy. He was brilliant on law points. Shakarlal was eventually acquitted.

I was thrown together with C.R. Das again in connection with presentation of the people's case before the Committee headed by Lord Hunter to inquire into the Punjab disorders and their sequel. I was to assist Das during the Committee's hearing in Delhi. He did not turn up till the morning of the first meeting, just a few hours before the inaugural sitting of the Hunter Committee. We went together to see Gandhiji, and then I wanted to rush home for changing into my morning suit. Das vetoed it. "No, my boy, nothing of the kind. My things have not arrived, and if I can't change into a morning suit, you won't. We will go there as we are." That settled the sartorial point and we went together with Malviyaji to the Committee Room in the Old Delhi Secretariat. The sitting was open to the public, but restricted by admission cards. Malviyaji took his seat as a counsel on one side of C.R. Das, and I on the other side. The proceedings began with the examination of Government's witnesses. Hunter led the examination in a most careful way, allowing no hint of preconceived bias. Justice Rankin followed with a more detailed cross-examination. One had to wait for the third, fourth or even the sixth question to realise what he was driving at. He usually sought to confirm the Government's case. Chimanlal Setalvad was equally astute, and followed him with questions calculated to confirm the people's case. Pandit Jagat Narain was vigorously and obviously for the public and strove to expose the excesses of the authorities. Sultan Ahmad, though animated by the same spirit, did not seem to have either Setalvad's skill or Jagat Narain's vigour.

Das's questions were at first exploratory, to discover the extent of latitude allowed, and then effectively disconcerting. When Jeffries, the Superintendent of Police, took the witness's chair I got my chance, and suggested to Das a number of questions. Jeffries turned in his chair and, looking at me, said with a smile: "I know, Mr. Asaf Ali would have us smoke the

unruly mob out, or would substitute the hose. But..." I had known English demonstrations, including the suffragette violence and its sequel. But I had never known the police firing on unarmed crowds. This was the beginning of the trouble in Delhi.

During the few days that the Committee sat in Delhi, Das made me spend most of my time with him in the Maidens Hotel, for he was lonely. I came close to him. We discussed poetry and literature during off hours. I was his habit, soon after tea, to slip into his pyjamas and start on the first peg of his favourite drink, and have his dinner in his room. After a review of the day's proceedings, he would tell me entertaining anecdotes, or talk about his poetry. He valued his poems if not higher than, at least equally with those of Tagore. Why, Aurobindo thought of his poems so highly that he had undertaken to render them into English. Das presented me with two slender and neat volumes of his poems in Bengali, affectionately autographed.

The day I went to see Das off to the Punjab, members of the Hunter Committee were also on the railway platform. Lord Hunter surprised most Indians by carrying his own suitcase. It pleased me to see an Englishman (he was Scotch) behaving as naturally as he would in England. If only Englishmen had remained truly English in behaviour and outlook, and had been true to their own traditions of freedom! India, with her dwarfed stature as a subject country, corrupted and bent Englishmen to the point of a hideous moral stoop. Only the most exceptional retained the better qualities of the English character. The rest became bullies and generally failed to fit into English society if they had remained in India for long. In my time these Anglo-Indians carried about them in England an odour regarded unpleasant.

There was an incident connected with my journalistic activity of this time which should be a warning to those who may be inclined to allow their zeal to outrun the strict demands of accuracy. After a particularly senseless shower of bullets by the military, who were in charge of the Town Hall area in Delhi, some bullets picked up from one of the busiest quarters were brought to me. As chance would have it, I was appearing in a dacoity case in which I had to cross-examine a gun expert, and in the course of my preparation I chanced upon the term 'soft-nosed bullets'.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the bullets that were shown to me, it appeared to me that they were soft-nosed. And without stopping to think what its implications might be, I said in my message to the *Chronicle* and the *Independent* that soft-nosed bullets had been used. The Government appointed a military commission to investigate the report, and issued a communique denying the allegation but adding that a bullet after striking masonry might look like a soft-nosed bullet but no such bullet was used. This had a serious sequel.

The authorities had a standing grievance against Horniman on some

half-a-dozen counts. This report on soft-nosed bullets served as the last straw, and the Bombay Government ordered the deportation of Horniman to England on 26th April 1919. I supplied Jinnah, who was Chairman of the Board of Directors of the *Chronicle*, with all relevant information, including the opinion given by the gun expert whom I consulted privately that service bullets could be made soft-nosed by rubbing and filing off their noses. Jinnah issued a counterblast fixing upon the weak spot of the official communique. The matter was raised in the House of Commons, and it was pointed out that Horniman had been ill and was absent from the editorial chair when the report appeared (it had appeared in the *Independent* also). But the authorities in British India were adamant, and Horniman had to be in England for some time before he could return.

In the early part of 1919 Vitthalbhai Patel went to England to appear before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian reforms. I drafted Delhi's representation, and among other matters connected with the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, I claimed the right of self-determination for Delhi as for other provinces and urged that instead of being isolated as a tiny imperial enclave on the Washington model, Delhi should be extended and contiguous parts of the Punjab and the United Provinces should be included in the extended province. Alternatively, Delhi should be allowed representation in the Punjab and United Provinces Legislatures since its interests in the neighbouring provinces were patent, and in the Central Legislature. This was a revival of my pet idea, which had gone by the board at the Delhi Congress. I took this draft to Surendranath Banerji, who was in Delhi in connection with the Imperial Council. This was my first direct contact with the old man. His thick glasses showed how poor his physical vision had become. But his voice retained much of its old timbre and volume. He took up my draft and went through it with care. He suggested the toning down of certain expressions which he thought were too strong and impudent, and remarked: "I am a student of Burke, and Burke says 'Prudence is the sovereign quality of statesmanship'. I accepted his correction.

Then I ventured to discuss the 'Montford' reforms with Surendranath Banerji. He was satisfied with the reforms and was frank about it. He belonged to the old group of stalwarts who had laboured to bring about this stage of democratic and representative government. It was the beginning, and although it was not the whole bread, he was content with what was given.

Surendranath talked of his past, and the hard times he had gone through. He had fought for years, but his journey was nearing the end. He talked like a tired old man wanting rest. Surendranath later served as a Minister in Bengal under the new Constitution, i.e. the Government of India Act of 1919. Dyarchy at the provincial level was acceptable to him. Is it not



remarkable that a quarter century later, dyarchy at the Centre has been under discussion recently?<sup>2</sup> But it is only for the duration of the present war. The political development of a whole generation has gone into the crystallisation of the idea of India's complete independence.

Gandhiji suspended the Satyagraha campaign in the second half of April 1919, following violent disorders. He declared that he had made a 'Himalayan miscalculation' in assuming that people in the mass were fit and ready for a non-violent struggle.

## NOTES

- 1 Unlike the standard bullet that can pass through the body of the person fired at without necessarily killing him, soft-nosed bullets are guaranteed to kill. Such over-kill is prohibited under the Geneva conventions on warfare.
- 2 During the Cripps Mission in 1942.

## **5. Khilafat and Non-cooperation**

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The great uprising of 1857 was ostensibly in support of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, and against usurpation by the East India Company. The British therefore perceived Muslims as their main enemy, though many Hindu sepoys and chieftains had also taken part in the uprising. On the other hand the Sikhs fought against the Muslims, in the service of the British, at the siege of Delhi in 1857-58. This was because of bitter memories of the torture to death of the fifth Sikh guru in Jehangir's time, the execution of the ninth guru by Aurangzeb in 1675, and the killing of two sons of the tenth and last guru by the Muslim governor of Sirhind.

Sikhs were therefore shown special favour under the new dispensation following the assumption of direct responsibility for the governance of India by the British Crown. Michael O'Dyer, Lt.-Governor of Punjab in the early part of this century, pointed out that the province occupied only a thirteenth part of India but furnished sixty per cent of the army. The high preference shown for Sikhs in recruitment to the army continued to be in evidence for decades after India's independence. Sikhs (for whom separate electorates were established in Punjab under the Government of India Act of 1919) were also shown preference in recruitment to the civil services. When the Constituent Assembly was debating a draft clause that sought to authorise the State to make provision for reservations in favour of classes not adequately represented in the public services, a fear was expressed by Sardar Ujjal Singh that the words might be interpreted to mean that no minority community would be given representation in the services on a scale higher than what it would get on a population basis. He said that this would be 'unfair' to Sikhs for whom 20% of public appointments were at the time reserved in the Punjab though they formed only 13% of the population of the province.

Very soon, the British overcame their hostility towards the Muslims and began to favour them alongside of the Sikhs. The foreign rulers saw that Hindus were to the fore in utilising the system of modern education through English,

introduced in the first half of the 19th century, and were beginning to ask for steps towards self government. Muslims were therefore to be encouraged as a counter to the nascent Indian nationalism. Unlike the Sikhs, Muslims had a substantial all-India presence and accounted for about 20% of India's population as against less than 2% in the case of Sikhs.

### **Minorityism as Imperial Policy**

The Secretary of State for India, Sir Charles Wood, gave detailed advice on the art of divide-and-rule to Lord Elgin, then Governor-General, in a series of communications starting from 3rd March 1862. The Secretary of State said: "We have maintained our power by playing off one part against the other, and we must continue to do so. Do what you can, therefore, to prevent all having a common feeling... The natural antagonism of the races is no inconsiderable element of our strength. If all India was to unite against us, how long could we maintain ourselves?"

Lord Dufferin, the next Governor-General, was assured by an English official, Sir W.H. Gregory, in a letter of 24th February 1886, that the policy of encouraging Muslims in education and in employment was sound, and would pay off: "I am confident that it will bear good fruits; indeed it seems to have done so already, by the complete abstention of the Mohammedans from Brahmin and Baboo agitation. It will be a great matter to sweeten our relations with this portion of the Indian population, the bravest and at one time the most dangerous. They all with one voice declare they got their whipping in 1857, and they take it like men. They now look to us alone, not to be subjected to Hindu domination."

This letter was written within two months of the first session of the Indian National Congress at Bombay. The outstanding Muslim personality in public life of that time, Badruddin Tyabji (1844-1906), had been invited and was to attend, but was detained outside Bombay on urgent business and could not come. He had to miss the second session too. His absence led some loyalist Muslims to claim that he was, like themselves, keeping away from the newly formed Congress. Apparently Lord Dufferin's informant thought so too.

Badruddin Tyabji not only attended the third session of the Congress, at Madras in 1887, but presided over it. And in his address he said that he failed to understand why Muslims should not work shoulder to shoulder with their fellow-countrymen for the common benefit of all.

Tyabji, who was the first Indian to become Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court, pulled up a British barrister who had made disparaging remarks about the Indian National Congress: "I have always regarded it (Congress presidentship) as the highest honour, higher than being on this Bench. Let me tell the counsel that in my Court no contemptuous references to that body will be permitted."

When Syed Ameer Ali invited Tyabji to attend a Muslim political conference that was proposed to be held at Calcutta, he replied: "You are no doubt aware that I have always been of opinion that in regard to political questions at large, the Mohammedans should make a common cause with their fellow countrymen of other creeds and persuasions, and I cannot help deprecating any disunion on such questions between ourselves and the Hindus and Parsees. If, therefore, the proposed Mohammedan Conference is started simply as a rival to the National Congress, I should entirely oppose it, as it seems to me that the proper course is to join the Congress and take part in its deliberations."

A section of the Muslim intelligentsia shared Tyabji's robust nationalism. Others shared the fear voiced by an older Muslim leader, Syed Ahmad Khan, that in India democracy based on representative government would result in Hindu domination and would be harmful to Muslim interests. Ahmad Khan wanted the Muslim community to offer its loyal co-operation to the British Government. This attitude was welcome to the British authorities, who did everything to encourage it.

At the root of this separatist trend was the delayed start of Indian Muslims on the path of modernisation through English education as compared to the Hindus, not to speak of Indian Christians and Parsees who had taken to western education with alacrity. This gap, which was to have profound consequences for the development of the sub-continent's polity, is marked by the life-spans of Rammohun Roy, namely 1772-1833, and of his counterpart as the initiator of social reform and modern education among the Indian Muslims, Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898).

The Muslim elite withdrew into sullen isolation after the 1857 revolt was crushed. Muslim parents who could afford at all to educate their children sent them to traditional schools for religious instruction, rather than to schools run by missionaries or by the government, where English was taught. It was only after two or three decades that the Muslims started coming out of the protective shell of orthodoxy into the sunlight of the contemporary world and modern knowledge. Virtually a whole generation thus missed the process of modernisation. It was Ahmad Khan who founded in 1875 the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, which was raised in 1921 to the status of a university as the Muslim University of Aligarh. In the sphere of social reform, Ahmad Khan attacked the Purdah system which symbolised the seclusion of women. He also deprecated the tendency to attribute supernatural powers and miracles to the Prophet and saints.

Though the Congress was established in 1885 with official blessing, its resolutions and the speeches thereon soon dismayed the British rulers. By 1900 the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, had decided to destroy the Congress. He said in a letter of 18th November 1900 to Lord Hamilton: "My own belief is that the Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my greatest ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise." The partition of Bengal, mooted in 1903,

was Curzon's brain-child. Of the 18 annual sessions of the Congress between 1885 and 1902, four had been hosted by Calcutta. Bengali nationalist leaders had presided over as many as six of the 14 annual sessions held outside Calcutta. The Bengali presence was thus conspicuous on the stage of Indian nationalism. And the Bengali nationalist intelligentsia was largely Hindu. Curzon decided to strike where, as he thought, it would hurt the cause of Indian nationalism most. Ironically, the partition of Bengal was, instead, to mark the beginning of the Indian struggle for freedom.

It was ostensibly for improvement of the administration that the division of Bengal, a Presidency of unwieldy size, was undertaken. It included, besides Bengal proper, Bihar, Orissa and Chota Nagpur. If administrative considerations had been primary, there were rational ways of reorganisation: for example, a reduction of the Bengal Presidency's size by constituting a new Chief Commissioner's province comprising the non-Bengali areas of Bihar and Chota Nagpur. The aim was different. Northern and Eastern Bengal, with Assam, was to form a new Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam; and Western Bengal with Bihar and Orissa was to constitute the Province of Bengal. Bengalis in Western Bengal would be separated from their kith and kin; and Bengali Hindus would be a minority in both the provinces. Commending the scheme to London, the Viceroy said in a despatch: "Calcutta is the centre from which the Congress party is manipulated throughout the whole of Bengal and indeed the whole of India. Its best wire-pullers and its most frothy orators all reside here... If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again, and you will be cementing and solidifying in the eastern flank of India a force already formidable and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future."

To the Muslims of Eastern Bengal, Curzon's appeal was frankly communal. Addressing a gathering at Dacca, he said: "When a proposal is put forward which would make Dacca the centre and possibly the capital of a new and self-sufficing administration, which must give to the people of these districts by reason of their numerical strength and their superior culture, the preponderating voice in the province so created, which would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of old Musalman viceroys and kings, which must develop local interests and trade to a degree that is impossible so long as you remain the appendage of another administration--can it be that the people of these districts are to be advised by their leaders to sacrifice all these great advantages from fear? Do you mean to be so blind to your future as to repudiate the offer?" The first Lt. Governor of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Joseph Bamfylde Fuller, said with reference to the two main communities--Muslims and Hindus--that they would be like two queens of his, the first being the favoured one.

The decision to partition Bengal was announced by the Government on 20th July 1905. It set off a mass movement of protest in Bengal, with sympathetic reaction in other parts of the country, the like of which had not been witnessed before. The repressive measures adopted by the British authorities were also unprecedented. Economic boycott of Britain was forged during this movement as the weapon of a weak nation against a strong power. Starting with cloth made in Manchester, the boycott movement soon widened to cover Liverpool salt and foreign sugar, and social boycott of those using British goods.

The Swadeshi movement spread to other parts of India. Confidential reports received by the Government from the intelligence bureau showed that, by the end of 1905, the Boycott-Swadeshi movement had affected 23 districts in the United Provinces, 15 towns in the Central Provinces, 24 towns in the Bombay Presidency, 20 districts in the Punjab and 13 districts in the Madras Presidency. In rural Delhi the people of Larsoli village took an oath to discard the use of imported sugar. When a trader was caught selling it, he was fined ten rupees. The Panchayat announced that any person who informed it of such a breach would be given a reward of ten rupees and the culprit would suffer eviction from the village. There were similar instances of social boycott elsewhere, including Bengal itself, during the anti-partition movement. These examples appear to have inspired Asaf Ali to propose social ostracism as the 'sanction' for the parallel system of people's self-government proposed by him in 1920 (discussed later in this Chapter).

Creative writers contributed significantly to the national awakening. One of the earliest among patriotic writers was Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-94). While he valued English as a unifying link among educated Indians (Bankim Chandra was in the first batch of Calcutta university graduates), he cautioned against alienation of the English-educated intelligentsia from the common people. He stressed the importance of Indian languages for communicating with the masses. Bankim Chandra's song 'Vande Mataram', which he incorporated in the novel 'Ananda Math', became the battle-song of the movement against the partition of the province in 1905.<sup>1</sup> The British banned its singing, and at the Bengal provincial conference held at Barisal in 1906, the delegates were severely beaten for singing the song in defiance of the ban.

The repressive measures bore heavily on students. On 10th October 1905 a government circular was issued over the signature of R.W. Carlyle, saying that students were being used for political purposes and "it is impossible to tolerate this in connection with institutions which Government either assists or countenances." The circular warned that unless heads of educational institutions prevented students' participation in the Swadeshi movement, their grant-in-aid would be withdrawn and the University would be asked to disaffiliate the institutions. If the head of an institution was himself loyal to the government

but unable to prevent student participation, he should prove his loyalty by furnishing to the educational authorities a list of the offending students.

This produced a strong reaction in the two Bengals. The outcome of the 'anti-Circular' movement was the establishment of the Jatiya Siksha Parishad, or Council of National Education. The Council wanted to impart education--literary as well as scientific and technical--on national lines, not in opposition to but standing apart from the existing systems of primary, secondary and university education. It stood for education ordinarily through the medium of the vernaculars, but with English as a compulsory subject. The Bengal National College was inaugurated on 14th August 1906, with Aurobindo Ghose as principal. The example inspired the formation of similar institutions under the auspices of national education councils in various parts of the country. The anti-partition movement thus anticipated two important features of the Non-cooperation movement launched by Gandhiji in the early 1920's: boycott of foreign goods, and the establishment of institutions of national education.

A natural sequel to the creation of a Muslim-majority province by dividing Bengal was the encouragement by the British of the formation of an all-India Muslim political organisation. Lord Minto, Curzon's successor, received on 1st October 1906 a Muslim delegation headed by the Aga Khan. That the delegation was sponsored by the British authorities is clear from an entry of the same date in the diary of Lady Minto: "This evening I have received the following letter from an official: 'I must send Your Excellency a line to say that a very, very big thing has happened today. A work of statesmanship that will affect India and Indian history for many a long year. It is nothing less than the pulling back of sixty-two millions of people from joining the ranks of the seditious opposition.'"

What was this momentous event? It was the Viceroy's acceptance of the principle, urged by the delegation led by the Aga Khan, of a separate Muslim electorate. This was the beginning of a process which was to break up the sub-continent four decades hence. The delegation told Lord Minto that representative institutions of the European type should be "adapted to the social, religious and political conditions obtaining in India." Pointing out that the Muslims formed between one-fifth and one-fourth of the total population of India, the delegation wanted that they should be given a more than proportionate share both in the legislatures and in public employment: "The position accorded to the Mahomedan community in any kind of representation, direct or indirect, and in all other ways affecting their status and influence, should be commensurate not merely with their numerical strength but also with their political importance and the position which they occupied in India a little more than a hundred years ago, and of which the traditions have naturally not faded from their minds." In other words, Muslims wanted to be treated as more important than, and not as equals of, other Indians.

Lord Minto responded most sympathetically. He agreed that "any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of this continent."

Shortly after this, Nawab Salimullah proposed the formation of a central Muslim organisation to the leaders of the community who had gathered at Dacca for the Mahomedan Educational Conference. Accordingly, on 30th December 1906 a political association called the All India Muslim League was formed. Its objects were "to promote feelings of loyalty towards the British government and to protect and advance the political and other rights of the Muslims of India."

In this atmosphere of separatism, a series of Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in Eastern Bengal, particularly in the districts of Mymensingh and Comilla. These were followed by a chain of communal disturbances in the ensuing years in Peshawar, United Provinces and Bihar.

Separate electorates for Muslims--or the election of Muslim members of legislatures by Muslims only--were provided for in the Indian Councils Act of 1909. The Act treated Muslims as more equal than other citizens, giving them disproportionately large representation in the Imperial and provincial Councils. Even Lord Minto, the then British Viceroy who was the author of the scheme, felt qualms. "I shall not be at all surprised if we have serious trouble over the excess of representation granted to Mohamadans", he wrote in November 1909. *Empire*, an Anglo-Indian newspaper of Calcutta, said: "When the Councils meet there seems every probability of the Government finding themselves in a position analogous to that of the Light Brigade in the famous verse, slightly adapted:

‘Moslems to right of them  
Moslems to left of them  
Moslems behind them  
Volleyed and thundered.’

Probably the Government never imagined that they would have so many Mahomedans to deal with, but there the fact remains."<sup>2</sup>

According to Minto, Gopal Krishna Gokhale's advocacy of democratic representation was a fine idea only from the Congress point of view: "It is misleading to talk of the many populations composing the people of the Indian Empire as if they were one nationality." Separate electorates were the means he devised for keeping Hindus and Muslims divided. Over the years, the British rulers carried their flattery of Indian Muslims so far that they treated the basic Indian identity as Muslim and described the rest of the Indian population as 'non-Mohammadan'. Thus we find in the officially published proceedings of the Central Legislative Assembly of the 1920's that not only is Lala Lajpatrai of Muslim-majority undivided Punjab described as member from 'Jullundur



Division: Non-Muhammadan' but members from the south too, where the Muslims are a small minority, are similarly described. Thus A. Rangaswami Iyengar is member from 'Tanjore-cum-Trichinopoly: Non-Muhammadan Rural', and C. Duraiswamy Aiyangar is member from 'Madras ceded districts and Chittoor: Non-Muhammadan Rural'!

Lord Hardinge, who replaced Minto as Viceroy towards the close of 1910, realised that there could be no peace till the partition of Bengal was ended. The annulment was announced on the occasion of the visit of the British king and queen, George V and Mary, for the Delhi Durbar in December 1911. Bihar, Chota Nagpur and Orissa were formed into a Lt. Governor's province; Assam reverted to Chief Commissionership; and the rest of the area constituted the province of Bengal. Simultaneously, it was announced that the capital would be shifted from Calcutta to Delhi.

The annulment of Bengal's partition had already become a major Muslim grievance within India when the blows struck at the Ottoman empire by European powers in 1912, in the course of the Balkan wars, evoked sympathy for Turkey. Its ruler was regarded by many Muslims the world over as their Khalifa or guardian. Syed Ahmad Khan, writing nearly four decades earlier, had questioned the propriety of regarding the Sultan of Turkey as having any jurisdiction over Muslims outside Turkey: "Khilafat literally means succession, and the person who succeeds is called the Khalifa...Their Khilafat or government is confined to the Muslim inhabitants of that country alone over which they rule...He (Sultan of Turkey) can in no sense be the Khalifa for those over whom he has no such authority." But in the popular estimation Turkey continued to be the symbol of Muslim power. Anti-British feeling ran high when the First World War broke out in 1914 with Britain and Turkey ranged on opposite sides. The attack on Turkey by Greek troops in 1919 created bitter resentment. Indian Muslims were now ready to join hands with Hindus in a common front against the alien rulers. The mood and the events of 1919 are narrated by Asaf Ali in his autobiographical notes:

The turn of events outside India powerfully affected the sentiment of Muslims. They were incensed at the dismemberment of the Turkish empire and the loss of the Sultan's control, as Khalif, over the holy places of Islam. Hindu-Muslim unity, advocated by Gandhiji, acquired a new urgency. In Delhi some of us, of the younger generation, were planning a big gesture. Maulana Abdullah conceived the idea of reducing the slaughter of cows on the occasion of Bakrid. By propaganda for which he was a genius, and by bullying for which he was a legion in himself, he took the fullest advantage of the emotional upheaval among the Mussalmans and succeeded in reducing the sacrifice of kine to a symbolic one per cent. The idea began to gain ground.

### **Visit to Deoband: Cow and Khilafat**

It was at this time that I received an invitation to address a public meeting at Deoband, the great centre of theological learning which was now imbued with enthusiasm for the Khilafat movement. I had, for economic reasons, confined my engagements outside Delhi to a few neighbouring places like Muttra, Agra, Ajmere, Muzaffarnagar and Meerut. I could not afford to spend much on travelling, and I was not willing to allow my hosts to bear my expenses. But an opportunity to visit Deoband was not to be missed.

The visit was a revelation for me. I found in that little town a fine body of devoted men of profound learning, the simplicity of whose life was inspiring. The lecture rooms had nothing but date-leaf matting. The erudite professors--the fame of whose learning was attracting students from as far as the North-Western Provinces and Afghanistan and Central Asia, and even from China-- addressed their scholars seated on these primitive mats. I visited their living rooms and found the same utter simplicity. But I was disappointed to find that the syllabus of the university was nearly six centuries old. They were still clinging to Pythagoras, Ptolemy and Aristotle as the last word on the secular side. Their notions of sciences, logic, mathematics and geography were sadly out of date. I discussed the possibility of a modernised syllabus with some of them, but found them supremely self-satisfied. Comparative theology was non-existent. Their knowledge of Islamic law and jurisprudence was deep and immense, but they did not seem prepared to re-examine precedents in the light of changing circumstances.

But I found among some of the younger generation--the senior scholars of the final class--a pliancy and readiness to consider new ideas. I availed myself of this opportunity to discuss with some of them the question of cow slaughter. Personally I did not regard it as salutary to pander to superstition, whether among Hindus or Muslims, but on purely economic grounds I was prepared to promote cow protection. The rural economy of the country pointed in that direction. Hindu sentiment was also bound up with it, and it was only politic to initiate a good-neighbourly gesture. Only as recently as 1917, terrible riots had broken out in Arrah, Shahabad and Kangri. Simple villagers who would ordinarily not only not kill but would feed snakes on milk, and ants on sugar, were carried away in their frenzy over cow sacrifice to loot and burn their Muslim neighbours, and of course some were themselves killed, injured and looted in the ensuing riots. To kill men and women in the zeal for protecting an animal could not be a religious or rational act, nor would it be a religious or rational act on the part of Muslims to exercise a right in a manner obnoxious to Hindus. Therefore, the mere maintenance of peace demanded a rational solution. A self-denying ordinance, I knew, could not be depended on as a lasting

solution. How long would self-denial hold? But the moment was most opportune for attempting a friendly gesture.

In my talks with the relatively open-minded senior students, I pointed out that the Tughlaqs and some other Muslim kings had acknowledged that no wise ruler could overlook the deep-rooted Hindu sentiment about cow slaughter, and had actually forbidden it within their realm. Why, I asked, could not Indian Muslims win the friendship of Hindus by forgoing beef altogether? Some said that it was desirable but in some parts like Rohilkhand the poor lived almost entirely on beef, it being the cheapest. Others said that while they were not unmindful of the sentiment of their Hindu neighbours and were prepared to advise their co-religionists to give up beef, and even reduce the Baqr Id sacrifices to the minimum, they could not admit in principle a total interdiction of cow slaughter. To do so would mean that they admitted the principle of worshipping the cow, and that would militate against their cardinal belief that none but the one and only God of the Universe was worthy of worship. Any forcible prevention of cow slaughter would, they held, lay upon them the duty of resistance.

I was all for freedom of action but I pushed the debate a little further. I asked how far one who claims this freedom could expect the other person to sympathise with him in his religious susceptibilities, e.g. the question of Khilafat. I found that they were prepared to go any far, short of complete abandonment of cow sacrifice. They wanted only the two-and-a-half days of the Bakr Id, out of the whole year, to be reserved for the possible exercise of the right to slaughter cows, which they were further prepared to reduce to a symbolic assertion of the right. The discussion and the outcome were most gratifying to me.

I returned to Delhi and went over the whole question with Hakim Sahib, and a formula was carefully drafted by way of a gesture. It aimed at drastic reduction of cow slaughter during the Baqr Id days, for somehow they had become the occasion for riots. It was strange that neither the huge slaughter for beef for the British troops from day to day, nor for daily consumption by Muslims, attracted much attention. Pious Hindus in public life did use to bring up the question in a subdued tone, but riots were reserved for Baqr Id. It was maintained by Muslims that most of the cattle so slaughtered came from Hindu peasants who had no great compunction in getting rid of their dry cows or disabled bullocks, and even fit cattle in times of economic stress for such prices as they could get.

Towards the close of 1919, Delhi leaders decided to convene the first Khilafat Conference. A reception committee was formed, and I along with Maulana Ahmad Said of Delhi were chosen as its honorary secretaries. A few months earlier I had organised a Khilafat Volunteer Corps of some sixty young men, mostly drawn from my neighbours, practically all of them poor artisans or workmen. Their zeal was all that could be desired.

One of them happened to be a fine young ex-soldier, a Jamadar, whose capability as a drill sergeant was invaluable. I had myself been drilled and disciplined during my Model School days. I put the volunteers into smart uniforms and, wearing one myself, I used to attend their parade every day. This corps became an example and incentive to other young men.

The time came for issuing invitations to Muslim and non-Muslim leaders. I drafted an invitation in Urdu, which after the Committee's approval was sent to Muslims, and another in English which went to the non-Muslim leaders over my signature. In this invitation I mentioned that the question of cow protection was likely to be considered by the Conference. Gandhiji and several Hindu leaders accepted the invitation.

I worked hard and under great pressure--arranging the reception, boarding and lodging of delegates and guests, drafting resolutions, and detailing the duties of volunteers. The drill worked tolerably well, except in the case of Gandhiji. I had arranged his stay with Principal Rudra, for I knew he would like it. But all the elaborate preparations I had made for his reception and guard of honour went wrong for two reasons. Abdullah, who was in charge, was just a few minutes late. The decorated carriage and the volunteers reached the railway station after Gandhiji's train had arrived. I was utterly tired, having worked late into the previous night, and got up just in time to meet the second of the two trains from Bombay that came within half an hour of each other. Gandhiji arrived by the first train, found none but his host at the station, and walked with Rudra to his house. When I reached the station, he had already gone. The decorated carriage was there, and so were the volunteers and Abdullah, looking silly. I lost my temper with everyone and rushed to Rudra's house to offer my apologies. I found Gandhiji in a justifiably angry mood. I tried to explain about the two trains, and the confusion. "You must have been standing on your head," he remarked, "when you read my telegram; otherwise there could be no confusion." The rebuke was amply deserved, and I tried to take it with good grace. It must seem strange now, but in spite of all that had happened since the Satyagraha campaign and Jallianwala, etc., Gandhiji was not yet regarded as a very important person; neither Hakimji who was chairman of the reception committee nor Ansari thought it necessary to receive him at the station.

My second ordeal was worse. After the invitations had been issued, Hakim Sahib made up his mind that since he was going to preside over the annual session of the Muslim League<sup>3</sup> only a few weeks hence at Amritsar, the question of cow protection should be postponed till then; an authoritative pronouncement from the platform of the League would be in the fitness of things. I felt mortified for, after what was stated in my invitation, it might look like securing the participation of the Hindu leaders on false representation. But Hakimji undertook to explain the matter in his address

as chairman of the reception committee and to clear my position.

Among the draft resolutions, we of the younger group had set our hearts on the one which called for boycott of British goods. When I showed the draft resolution to Gandhiji, he at once expressed his disapproval of boycott on the ground that it savoured of hate. The elders among the convenors of the Khilafat Conference including Hakim Sahib, Ansari and Syed Riza Ali were also strongly opposed to it, and we had carried it in the drafting sub-committee despite their opposition. They thought it was premature, being a drastic sanction which should be considered only if representations to the British Government failed. But Gandhiji's point was different. Boycott to him was an expression of hate, and therefore 'violent'. Who among Muslims could appreciate this?

I came back and mentioned Gandhiji's reaction to some of the delegates who had arrived and besieged me in the office, now transferred to the green room of the Sangam Theatre where the Conference was to take place. The delegates urged me to persist with the boycott resolution. Hasrat Mohani undertook to sponsor it and canvass support; and he was a legion in himself. It was not Gandhiji of whom he and the other delegates were thinking, for Gandhiji was only an honoured guest. They were worried about the moderation of the Muslim elders.

The conference opened amidst great enthusiasm. Among the Hindus who attended were, besides Gandhiji, Krishnakant Malaviya and Munshi Ishwar Saran. Messages were received from C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru among others. The threads of the conference were very much in my hands, and I could have pushed to the fore the resolution on the cow. But this was needless after Hakimji's explanation, with which everyone was satisfied. It was the boycott resolution which caused a tense atmosphere in the subjects committee. Gandhiji, who was invited to speak, made a passionate speech strenuously opposing boycott. He spoke with his characteristic ardour against the 'violence in thought' from which, according to him the idea of boycott was born. Someone from among the elders was persuaded to support Gandhiji on the higher grounds of Islamic teaching. The example of Caliph Ali was quoted. In one of the religious wars, the great Ali was on the point of severing the head of an overpowered enemy, when the prostrate person spat on his face. Ali immediately abandoned the idea of beheading him and got off his chest. The astonished Jew asked him the reason. Ali replied that the insult had confused his motive: he had no right to kill the Jew out of the personal anger provoked by him. This was cited as an object lesson that hatred and anger were ruled out of higher purposes. But the argument did not go down, and the subjects committee passed the boycott resolution for discussion by the Conference.

## **Genesis of Non-Cooperation**

Gandhiji desired that he should be allowed an opportunity to oppose the boycott resolution in the open conference, and it was decided that he could do so. But while this was being discussed in the subjects committee, Gandhiji was asked by someone whether he could suggest a substitute for boycott. He promptly replied: "Yes, Non-cooperation." This expression, coined by Gandhiji, has since become part of the English vocabulary. For years Englishmen had some difficulty with the term, but now the House of Commons uses it freely.

At the time, however, in November 1919, when Gandhiji came up with Non-cooperation as the alternative to Boycott, none of us had any idea what it meant. Asked to explain it, he entered upon the task with a will. He said it meant withdrawing all cooperation from the British and their institutions--schools, law courts, services--giving up titles, and, finally, stopping the payment of taxes. The subjects committee jumped at the idea. The elders were flabbergasted but consoled themselves with the thought that it was a distant and impracticable scheme and therefore more innocuous than boycott. The subjects committee agreed to the idea, but not as a substitute. Gandhiji then urged that as against the big and comprehensive idea of non-cooperation, boycott was a trifle and should be dropped. The elders seized this point and urged it with force. The committee wavered. But Hasrat Mohani stuck to his guns. A compromise was reached, to the effect that the non-cooperation resolution should be placed before the conference first. The expectation of the opponents of boycott was that after the passage of the non-cooperation resolution, the President would rule the other out as superfluous. The dissenting section, however, reserved their right to push on with the boycott resolution.

The discussion in the subjects committee was so protracted that it encroached upon the time of the Conference. Delegates filled the hall, and overheard the concluding part of the arguments in the subjects committee which was meeting on the dais. Fazlul Huq, who was to have presided, had been taken ill and Riza Ali was in the chair. The subjects committee dispersed into the hall, and the proceedings began. I confess that I played my part in defeating the tactical move of the elders. When the President asked me--I was seated to his right--to produce the non-cooperation resolution, from out of the welter of papers before me I handed him instead the boycott resolution. The proposer was called upon, and the resolution was read out amid thunderous applause. Riza Ali looked at me, smiled, and said in Urdu: "So you have scored."

Gandhiji claimed the floor after the resolution had been seconded. He made one of his finest speeches, arguing his points against the resolution with passion. The audience listened to him with rapt attention during his 20-minute address. We had kept Hasrat Mohani in reserve for a

counterblast. He was in form, and made an equally impassioned appeal for the passage of the boycott resolution. It was carried.

The non-cooperation resolution was taken up next. And Gandhiji was requested to explain and amplify its meaning and scope. He began by reverting to the previous resolution and expressing his dissent. Then he passed on to the enunciation of the meaning of non-cooperation. Nobody asked what was to follow the withdrawal of scholars from schools and colleges, of lawyers from courts, of legislators from Councils, and public servants from the services. Giving up of titles would be a striking demonstration, but titles were held by confirmed loyalists, and it was no easy task to persuade them to surrender their life's prize. True, Judge Subramaniam Aiyer had returned his knighthood after Mrs. Besant's internment. But how many Subramaniam Aiyers were to be found among the Muslims? How could you blast the careers of children if no private schools and colleges were available for the continuance of their studies after withdrawal from government institutions? A hundred questions clamoured for answer, but the delegates represented the millions of angry, excited and impatient Muslim men and women who were spoiling for a fight. Boycott of British goods was a weapon they understood and were bent on wielding, and now non-cooperation meant a bigger, more comprehensive boycott of the British Government. (Eventually boycott of foreign goods did come to be part of the non-cooperation programme.) The resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority. Present were some members of the Councils, and they sneaked out before the voting. They had not suspected that non-cooperation would mean so much. Who had?

Gandhiji thus won his first innings on a country-wide scale. He had experimented with Satyagraha or civil disobedience on a small scale so far--in South Africa, Champaran and Kaira. He then launched it on all-India basis early in 1919 but withdrew it after certain unfortunate developments. Non-cooperation was a much larger and comprehensive scheme, covering almost the entire field of life. It aimed at an ocular demonstration of the severance of spiritual and factual connection between the alien rulers and the ruled. Indian Muslims, highly strung at this time, readily accepted his lead and paved the way for the endorsement of non-cooperation by a bigger and more critical organisation-- the Indian National Congress--a year later.

It is a historic fact which has not found adequate appreciation-- and has, in the heat and dust of later communal controversies, been lost sight of--that November 1919 and the first Khilafat Conference constitute the first landmark in the history of non-violent non-cooperation. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, who is generally an objective observer and accurate chronicler of political events in India, has failed to appreciate this fact. If

non-cooperation is a revolutionary doctrine and method of political action, we owe a debt to those who were first in the field and who led the way. Muslims had suffered the most following 1857. The property of the 'rebels' was either freely conferred by the British upon the loyal ones or sold to them for a song. There were both Hindus and some Muslims among these beneficiaries. The Wahabis, a sort of Muslim Quakers, refused to submit and carried on guerrilla warfare under leaders drawn from the Muslim divines. The Wahabis were rooted out and hanged in large numbers or transported. All this happened until a few years before the Congress was born. The Muslim divines--with exceptions, of course--had stood aloof from British institutions down to the day that Gandhiji proposed non-cooperation. To the maulvis it was an easily understood doctrine. They had decried Sir Syed's Aligarh College movement, and had nothing but contempt for western ways of dress, language and manners. And now, hearing Gandhiji talk of non-cooperation, they said in effect: 'But we have done this these sixty years, and we even wear homespun.' Those who were taken aback were the politically minded elders of the Muslim community.

The next item before the Khilafat Conference was the establishment of a central organisation with branches throughout the country. This gave rise to a controversy between Delhi and Bombay. Seth Chhotani contended that he had already founded an organisation in Bombay. We wanted something wider and better organised, with headquarters in Delhi. Finally, for financial reasons, we had to agree to Chhotani's proposal and the Central Khilafat Committee's office was allowed by the delegates to be located in Bombay. The conference ended successfully, leaving in Delhi a provincial organisation with Hakim Sahib as its President and myself and Maulana Ahmad Said as secretaries.

The remaining weeks of 1919 were, for me, packed with intense activity. Hakimji's presidential address at the Amritsar session of the Muslim League had to be rendered in English at short notice. He wrote simple but meticulously accurate Urdu, and it was all the more difficult to English it. There were no decent presses in Delhi, and it was an ordeal to read the proofs. Dealing with dyarchy in the provinces under the Montford Reforms embodied in the Government of India Act of 1919, Hakimji compared it with the anecdotal partition of ancestral property between two brothers, one a poet and the other a man of the world. The latter turned to his poetically inclined brother and described the unpoetic nature of material things like the ugly brick-and-mortar building. But he acknowledged that he was unfit to appreciate aetherial things, and had no right to retain for himself anything between the roof of the top storey and the Pleiades. The poet should, therefore, have exclusive possession of all that lay between these two limits. It was not a strictly accurate but poetically



eloquent illustration of the division between the effective and secondary portfolios under dyarchy.

Hakimji's reference to Hindu-Muslim entente was a landmark because the question nearest to the religiously minded Hindus' heart, namely cow protection, was dealt with in a practical way. He called upon Muslims to show their regard for Hindu susceptibilities by voluntarily giving preference to non-bovine species for sacrifice at Bakr Id. The League passed a resolution in terms of Hakimji's address, and the Congress which also met at Amritsar recorded a resolution of thanks for the 'giving up' of cow slaughter. This was obviously going too far, and immediately set the Muslims by the ear. What was intended as a gesture, and was expected to expand under voluntary effort, was seized on to make it appear that Muslims were to abstain from cow sacrifice altogether.

Since the situation was pregnant with mischief, Asaf Ali took up the matter with Gandhiji. He addressed the following letter on 19th January 1920:

My dear Mr. Gandhi,

I regret to say that I am unable to come to pay my respects to you, as I have been laid up for some weeks although I am better now.

I have been thinking of addressing you a few words regarding the 'Go-Raksha' question. I feel much relieved to note that since the time of the first Khilafat Conference a definite, though only a modest, step has been taken. But I have had occasion to devote some serious thought to the question, and I feel that I must lay my conclusions before you in the frankest words possible.

1. With the exception of just a very few Mussalmans of India who happen to be the leading lights of the community, I am afraid the Moslem community as a whole has had little time to consider the question with the care which it deserves. Hakim Sahib is to my knowledge about the only Mussalman of any position in Delhi, besides Dr. Ansari, who can be said to have revolved the question in his mind. But I doubt very much if even these gentlemen have had the occasion, in their multifarious activity, to consider the problem from any but the political and incidentally from the religious points of view. The economic aspect of the question must necessarily be present before anyone who sits down to consider the whole problem.

2. Judging from the language which is being used by Hindus in thanking the Moslem League for adopting a resolution in regard to 'Go-Raksha' or the protection of cows, I have come to the conclusion that all the difficulties besetting this question are not fully realised by those who, exceeding or overlooking the careful language of the presidential address and the resolution, assume that cow killing has come to an end. I may be quite wrong, but I feel that Hindus would be better advised to take nothing for

granted, and to word their resolutions so as to remain within the presidential pronouncement. Let us not overlook that a section (and unfortunately a fairly influential section) of Ulemas are sitting on the fence and have not joined us. They are unable to see fairness in any political transaction--I detest the word--without *quid pro quo*. Lucknow, I find, has understood it and proceeded along the right line in declaring that Hindu Lucknow would abstain from any manifestation of joy on the *ashra- i-Muharram* occasion. Response of this kind is bound to have far-reaching effect in the right direction. On the other hand, the attitude adopted by some of the speakers at the Humanitarian League meeting held recently at Bombay is not free from embarrassing effects, because they went to the extent of assuming that the Moslem League had resolved to cease killing cows and goats. I can well imagine the sentiments which lead some people into such emphatic assertions, but if I am not too presumptuous in saying so, they would all be ready to follow your lead if you thought it proper to give it to them now.

3. They are suggesting that there should be formation of boards for carrying on propagandist work to bring about the desired result. Now, I am not sure that such a procedure would or could be profitable unless the whole affair was under the direction and vigilant management of responsible and thoughtful persons. Knowing as we do the attitude of some of the Ulemas and at the same time being conscious of the reasonableness of the movement, it would be far more advisable to let the idea soak through the masses, without any active propagandist work, during the next two or three years. I am fully conscious of the fact that special circumstances arising out of the Khilafat issue in the immediate future may so affect this question as to render all propagandist work wholly unnecessary, and may fashion its solution to the entire satisfaction of the Hindus (at least insofar as it relates to the Mussalmans: for we must not forget that by far the largest consumption of beef is to be accounted for by others). But in politics, accidents however probable must not be relied on. Therefore I venture to suggest that too high hopes should not be raised among the Hindu masses lest they should become the seeds of undesirable complications. Narrow-minded and interested parties have, I hear from day to day, found in this an instrument of mischief. Unless we are prepared to devote anxious thought to the question, there are chances of our being mocked. The stronger currents are undoubtedly with us--or, rather, we are not opposed to the stronger currents of life--but the stronger the current the more violent is the disturbance caused by any impediment in its way. Our political advance is bound to deepen the complexities of life, and the measure of our fitness for higher developments will depend on our readiness and capability to grapple with those complexities.

And there I must end the political aspect of the question. I shall take the liberty of engaging your attention for another few minutes for the purpose of disentangling the fundamental rights and wrongs of an important question with ethical bearings. I should be absolutely blind if I failed to see the immediacy of the stoppage of cow slaughter, having regard to the obvious political needs. But I have failed to see--and I say this with the greatest possible respect for religious feelings--the actual religious aspect of the question. If the economic importance of the cow is the only explanation, I beg to suggest that the eternal sanctification of the animal becomes rather an exaggerated idea. If, however, the argument is advanced along what I may conveniently call humanitarian lines of thought, its examination in the light of biological evolution exposes its weak points. The only and rational objection which I am ready to grant is the economic one, but it has its limit and cannot be allowed to encroach upon man's right to assert his 'fitness' for survival--for the integration and consummation of the universal purpose. Nor is it inconsistent with the 'divine' in man to claim his aureole by mounting the wreck of lower intelligence. The lower forms from which man has emerged are obviously materials for his use, and it is for him to decide how to use them. He amuses himself with some, and uses others. He would be abdicating his throne to set lower forms above him. (Please excuse my language, but I am writing with the deepest respect for all religious sentiments and beliefs.)

Asaf Ali cites the Gita to suggest that Krishna, in advising Arjuna not to hesitate on the battlefield, justified the killing of lower forms of intelligence--"that is what is meant by 'the unrighteous, I suppose'". But Asaf Ali himself goes on to say: "We know better now...for, unless the best chances are offered to all, it is impossible to say definitely which of the millions is a more highly evolved soul than others." Asaf Ali says in conclusion:

However, without plunging headlong into deeper questions, I feel quite certain that I am not prepared at present to look at the cow-killing question from any but a purely political standpoint, and as such I fear I regard it a temporary question. I shall eagerly await any further light on the subject. Assuring you of my reverential regard for you,

I beg to remain,  
Yours respectfully,  
M. Asaf Ali.

Gandhiji in his reply dated 25th January 1920 deals with each of the points raised by Asaf Ali: "I was sorry to hear of your illness. I hope you are now better if not quite restored. I thank you for your frank letter.

"I shall certainly take every step to see that there is no misunderstanding regarding the cow-slaughter resolution. I quite agree with you that no false hopes should be raised regarding the Mahomedan attitude on (the) point and that all propaganda on our (Hindus') part among Mahomedans should be

avoided.

"I am glad too that you have raised the moral issue and discussed it not on purely orthodox religious but on broad and humanitarian grounds. I would however say on the orthodox religious grounds that, when two great communities live side by side, the religious sense of the one demands a scrupulous regard for the practices of the other, so long as they are not immoral from a universal standpoint. For instance I see nothing wrong in non-Muslims going to Mecca. But there is nothing immoral in your prohibiting non-Muslims from entering it. And as the sentiment of prohibition has grown during all these 1,300 years, I support it.

"So may it be for the Mahomedan regarding cow-slaughter.

"Now for the broad humanitarian ground: we shall probably have to agree to differ; your viewpoint seems to be so different from mine. I consider that God has not created lower forms of animal life for man to use them as he will. Man realises his highest station not by indulging but by abstinence. I have no right to destroy animal life if I can subsist healthily on vegetable life. I have no right to slaughter all animal life because I find it necessary to slaughter some animal life. Therefore if I can live well on goats, fish and fowl (surely enough in all conscience), it is sin for me to destroy cows for my sustenance. And it was some such argument that decided the rishis of old in regarding the cow as sacred, especially when they found that the cow was the greatest economic asset in national life. And I see nothing wrong, immoral or sinful in offering worship to an animal so serviceable as the cow so long as my worship does not put her on a level with her Creator. I immensely appreciate the idea (so emphasized by Islam) that special worship must be reserved for the Creator of us all. But I must not mix up cow-worship and cow-slaughter. If you accept the proposition that man is more man as he abstains more, you will have no difficulty in allowing that cow-slaughter is indefensible on moral grounds.

"I agree with you that so far as the economic ground is concerned the slaughter for the Europeans is much the most important. In my opinion the cry against the Mahomedan slaughter on the Bakr Id is unbecoming so long as we Hindus remain dumb about the daily slaughter going on in the public abattoirs. We strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."

Asaf Ali narrates the tumultuous welcome received by Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulana Mohammad Ali when they were freed from internment in December 1919:

At the end of more than four years of internment, the Ali Brothers returned to Delhi after attending the Congress and Muslim League sessions in Amritsar. Their arrival evoked an amazing upheaval of public feeling and demonstrations of joy and enthusiasm. There was no end to the presentation of purses meant for help to Turkey, banquets and receptions. Their triumphal procession was perhaps the biggest Delhi had seen within living memory. They floated on the crest of an oceanic wave of public en-

thusiasm. What an opportunity to mould the destiny of the country and the community they had, for this reception in Delhi was only the forerunner of countless receptions all over India.

Mahatma Gandhi had guided the Khilafat Conference when it passed the resolution on non-cooperation in general terms in November 1919. And now the programme had to be given concrete shape. This was done at a meeting in Delhi early in 1920 of Hindu and Muslim leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, the Ali Brothers, Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Abul Kalam, Ansari, Hakimji and Maulana Abdul Bari. This was preceded by discussion in an informal sub-committee which met at Ansari's house and worked out a fourfold programme, in that order, of abandonment of honours and honorary offices; withdrawal from educational institutions; withdrawal from Government service; and non-payment of taxes. I was present at this meeting as secretary of the Delhi Khilafat Committee.

Hakimji was quite prepared to return his title of Haziquil Mulk, which he did. But he was not sure yet of the further steps because they would affect the fate of the Tibbia College. It was his life-work, and his whole soul was focussed on it. Hakim Ajmal Khan was in no sense less gifted than Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. He did for the recognition of and instruction in the indigenous systems of medicine what Sir Syed had done for the education of Muslims. The College he founded in Delhi was a monumental institution, like the Aligarh College. And now the question was whether he should throw his lot in with the political movement and thereby drag his institution too into it. Hakimji made this point plain before the meeting at the very outset. I realised for the first time why he had been cautious during the November conference. He was thinking not of how non-cooperation would affect him personally, but of a cause for which he had laboured and an institution he had built up through his influence among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, and among the princely houses and the wealthy as well as the poor. No less than 25 lakhs of rupees had gone into the building up of the College. Sultan Singh was among his devoted helpers; Patiala, Gwalior, Rampur, Bikaner, Bhopal and others among the Princes; and numerous other donors. He expected much from the Government, too. And now he was called upon to decide on a step which would cut off most sources. Hakimji was in the same situation as Malaviyaji, whose soul was concentrated on the Benaras College (now University) and who, despite his burning patriotism, hung back from Non-cooperation.

In Asaf Ali's own case, participation in the non-cooperation movement entailed a heavy sacrifice. He had to sell away the only substantial property that he then possessed, in the form of his share in the ancestral zamindari village of Bhagwanpore in the Nagina tahsil of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). He describes the circumstances both of his coming into, and soon giving up, the property:

The death of my grandmother in 1916 had put me in possession of the family property--a village in Tahsil Nagina. The very first thing I did was to portion out the shares of my aunt and the heirs of my uncle, who had predeceased my grandmother. I need not have done so and I was strongly advised not to, and to resist legal proceedings if necessary. My sense of fairness rejected this course.

I could not undertake personal supervision of the estate, busy as I was with my profession and with politics--mainly politics--and some literary amusement. Therefore, with the consent of the co-sharers, I leased it out and distributed the proceeds to everyone, down to vulgar fractions, every year. With increasing involvement in political work, my legal practice was suffering and my debts were mounting. By 1920 I decided to liquidate my debts, now in the neighbourhood of Rs.7,000, by disposing of my share of the village. With Non-cooperation (which included boycott of the law courts of the British regime) staring me in the face, I saw no other way out. My close friends regretted my decision for they felt that my circumstances demanded a course different from such 'heroic' self-immolation. The struggle was between dynamic emotion and cold logic, and the latter proved a poor rudder. There is something at the core of existence which loves to go beyond the limits of the logic of safety. The inner urge for self-expression and self-respect moves us more than logic. And it is this urge which in its sublimation assumes larger dimensions: working for one's country, the human race, and for abstract ideas or higher ends.

My decision cut me off from the United Provinces, where I had a large tribe of blood relations. When Pandit Motilal Nehru wanted me to contest a provincial council seat in 1923, I regretted that I had sold out the basis of my electoral qualification. But there was no alternative for me in 1920 other than giving up Non-cooperation politics, and that I was not prepared to do.

### **Interpreting Tilak and 'Ksheerasagara'**

Returning to the subject of the momentous gathering of Hindu and Muslim stalwarts at Delhi in January 1920, Asaf Ali describes how he had occasion to observe Bal Gangadhar Tilak at close range and to act as his interpreter at a public meeting:

Tilak had to leave the meeting after some time because he was to be taken in procession through the bazars of Delhi. He therefore rose and wished to be excused. Gandhiji looked perturbed for a moment, and Tilak noticing this, and answering someone's question about his opinion, said that it should be taken for granted that he would subscribe to anything that was decided at this consultation. "Because", he added, "I am prepared to go much further."

I attended the same evening a mass meeting that was to be addressed by Tilak. I also had the privilege to be called upon by Swami Shraddhanand, who presided, to render Tilak's English speech into Urdu. It was, if I am not mistaken, his first public utterance in Delhi. It proved his last, for he died in August, and I paid him tribute in what the Urdu Press described as one of the best speeches I have ever made.

Tilak spoke at the old Pataudi House, in Daryaganj, since meetings in places of public resort continued to be banned in Delhi unless with prior permission. After the tragedy of March-April 1919, a large sum had been collected in Delhi, including a major donation of some 40 or 50 thousand rupees by Raghunath Lohia with which Pataudi House was acquired to serve as a memorial for the martyrs who had been shot down in Delhi. It was an apt venue, for the theme of Tilak's memorable address was India's struggle for freedom.

He approached the subject by way of a well known Hindu legend. The striving for freedom was like the search of the Surs and Asurs (gods or the virtuous, and their antitheses) for *amrit* or the nectar of immortality. The antigods had somehow managed to divide the sovereignty of the world with the gods, and unless the gods obtained immortality they would be overwhelmed by the Asurs. The Supreme God was approached. He set his progeny the task of churning the milk-ocean of unlimited potentialities with the Mandrachal mountain (life's immutable laws) as the churning rod and the Great Snake of Eternal Time as the cord passed round it. The Surs and Asurs were to work each end of the cord. (It is a beautiful and profound allegory in pastoral accents.) The great ocean yielded rare jewels or the essential factors of civilized life including the horse (representing the hunting stage of human civilization), the cow (a great benefactor of man of the pastoral and agricultural period), the tree of desire, the wise doctor Dhanwantri (India's Aesculapius), Lakshmi the goddess of prosperity, *vish* (poison) and finally the nectar of immortality.

Tilak pointed out that in this great effort, poison preceded nectar. Immortality could not be had without the ordeal of the poison. Nor could freedom be obtained without suffering. And then Tilak made one of those statements which only the great and acknowledged leaders could dare to: "Don't imagine for a moment that I want to work for your or India's freedom." The audience sat there spell-bound but mystified by this announcement, and waited in tense expectation for its elucidation. As a consummate orator, he paused and looked round, reading the faces of his listeners. Then he said with great confidence: "I would have wanted, worked for and suffered for freedom wherever I might have been, on the face of this earth." Plaudits rent the welkin. "It is", he added, "the demand of my nature." More cheers, and shouts of Tilak Maharaj Ki Jai (Victory to the Great Tilak).

In interpreting the speech I allowed myself latitude for commentary, and collected cheers tenfold for Tilak. Whereas his speech in English drew applause only from the English-knowing section of the audience, swelled by the others without knowing what had been said, my rendering and commentary not only brought Tilak's sentences to life but heightened their effect. The venerable old man marked his appreciation of my role with generous words which I had reason to be proud of.

Over the years since 1915, I have voraciously consumed as much as I could of India's vast store of ancient mythology, epics and philosophy. A valuable introduction to Hindu thought was *Ain-i-Akbari*, with Jarret and Blochmann's commentaries and notes. I was amazed by the analytical mind of the ancients. English translations of the Bhagwat Gita and Ramanuja's commentary gave me much more than anything else. The Gita appeared to me to contain the essence of Hindu thought but there was much in it, along with sublime insights, which militated against rational human values. It seemed to be loaded with Brahminical reservations and an artificially bolstered supremacy of the elect, and contained tributes to superstition. What, however, was of pure metal in it was superb and exquisitely beautiful. •

In my study of the sources of Indian tradition, I have come across only a few hints here and there about the meaning of the various figures of speech employed in the myth of the churning of the milk-ocean which I have just quoted and which every Hindu knows from the Mahabharata and other literature commonly read or heard. But I feel justified in putting down what appears to me to be a proper interpretation of it. Sur and Asur may be taken to be the eternal forces of creation, the positive and the negative, the thesis and antithesis in the field of being. The serpent as symbol of Eternity seems to me to be appropriate, from resemblance to the sloughing process. Time casts off the outer skin and emerges from its winter sleep a new and dynamic being. According to the ancients Eternity or Time (Kaal) was like a snake which held everything in its constricting coils, and with its tail in its mouth encircled the whole of existence. With the churning of the sea of potentialities, concrete forms emerged. The poison of sorrow and suffering is inseparably a part of the human condition. Siva holds it in his throat because the poison can neither be let loose nor swallowed and thereby allowed to destroy creation which is both outside, and contained within, Siva. Vishnu then appears as a beautiful woman Mohini who, being sought by both parties, offers to arbitrate and divide immortality between the Surs and Asurs. However, Mohini cheats the bad and gives the beverage of immortality to the Surs. I don't like this cheating. It is not god-like. But both Greek and Indian mythologies are full of such human weaknesses, stratagems, revolts, romances and tragedies. We can admire the poetry of it without weighing everything in the golden scales of



perfection. What, however, disappoints me at times is the tendency of emancipated intelligence to look for unquestionable revelation in the poetic lisplings of the gifted among the ancients. The Puranas are rich mines, nearly abandoned on account of the flood of new ideas. They contain abundant treasure for sociologists and gems of wisdom lying embedded in discouraging heaps of fairy tales, garbled verbiage and sheer nonsense. Those who would have them serve for historical chronicles or straightforward philosophy or scientific lore do no justice either to the greatness of the ancients or to their own intelligence. They miss the real value of such literature. Man would be a poor specimen of creation if what was done or said by his ancestors some centuries, or perhaps millennia, ago cannot be improved upon. Even in the region of eternal truth, there are numerous angles, planes and coordinates from which the ultimate can be viewed. If this is a rebuke to shallow patriotism, it is a loving rebuke, not a sneer. And I fear that the interpretation I have given of Ksheerasagara-manthan is itself an illustration of what is, at times, carried to a ridiculous excess.

Reverses suffered for a long time reawaken the desire to resume the march of destiny. The reflow of racial pride leads to an unfortunate effort to glorify the past rather than assess its precise value and redouble the effort to catch up with others who have advanced. The phenomenon is common to all those who wake up after a fierce blow of misfortune. Until recently Muslims all over the world, and Indian Muslims even now, have been passing through a similar state of psychological reaction. Like gardeners of poor skill they tug the fading beauty of the last flowers before the blast of autumn, rather than pluck out the plants run to seed and prepare the ground for fresh sowing suited to the season. The creative sap disappears during the racial autumn and only with the approach of spring does the sap of creative intelligence begin to flow again and the bare branches burst into buds. Now that India's racial autumn seems to have run its course, the resurgence of sap should lead to a quick and vigorous efflorescence. Rather a speculative spin out, but I do believe in the universality of natural processes. Further, I believe in the infusion of fresh blood to keep the race going. This, however, takes me somewhat far out of my appointed track, and therefore here is a period to it.

An incident soon after Tilak's address in Delhi made Asaf Ali realise how nervous the administration was feeling about the tempo of the rising forces of nationalism. He writes:

Muttra Congressmen had been inviting me for a public meeting, and one day when I started for Muttra I had a dispute at the railway station with a British officer. He had asked his orderly, while I was talking to some friends on the railway platform, to remove my things from my berth in a 1st Class carriage. During the scene, Girjashankar Bajpai (now Sir, and

British India's Agent General in the U.S.A.) came up to me and invited me to his compartment. I was very pleased to meet him after the National Liberal Club days in London. I insisted on staying where I was because I wanted to teach a lesson to the ill-behaved Englishman. But I was surprised to learn that Girja was Collector of Muttra and had to interrupt his holiday in Delhi to rush back because I was going there! His Superintendent of Police had wired to him that I was expected. I told him that it was unnecessary for him to rush back to his headquarters: surely I was not going to set the Yamuna on fire?

Girja invited me to tea at his luxuriously furnished bungalow while I was in Muttra. We were old friends and talked of old times, and only incidentally of his present charge. My speech in Muttra was typical of stump oratory of the time and went down well. But I was given a tip by an admirer who made bold to suggest that the impact would be greater and I would win Muttra heart and soul if my speeches were larded with Hindi and with Hindu mythology associated with Krishna. My subsequent visits to Muttra, which were frequent, were marked by unbounded public enthusiasm because I followed the tip. I picked up a good deal of Hindi vocabulary which later on stood me in very good stead even in Gurukul Kangri, where Swami Shradhhanand complimented me in public and called me a 'Pandit'. Muttra made me study more of Hindi and of Hindu literature including Tulsidas's Ramayana.

### **Jamiatul-Ulema-i-Hind**

A strange incident of a personal nature happened about this time. At the founding conference of the Jamiatul-Ulema in November 1919, I was sent for by Hakimji and the moment I went among the great leaders on the dais, someone, probably Maulana Abdul Majid Badayuni who was very kindly disposed towards me, noticed the growth of a beard. Working hard for days and nights together, I had not shaved for about a week. He jokingly congratulated me, within the hearing of others, on this 'improvement'. It was taken up in all seriousness by others, and before I knew where I was, one of the speakers brought me into his speech as a model of reclaimed young western-educated Muslims and appealed to others to follow my example. And the accidental hirsute growth stuck to my chin by public acclamation of the religiously minded. Ansari, Sherwani and others had to follow suit. (Even C.R.Das grew a full beard in prison). Eventually all these 'Khilafat beards' went off our facial landscape. For the time, however, beards and the title 'Maulana' were the order of the day. I remained a 'Maulana' for quite a space of time until I emerged again a 'Mr.', some years later, from the wreck of the Khilafat edifice.

Asaf Ali discusses in his unfinished autobiography the historic significance of the gathering of Muslim divines in November 1919 which resulted in the formation of the Jamiatul-Ulema-i-Hind and the issue of a fatwa against cooperation with the British authorities in India.

The meeting of the Ulema, where an accidental neglect of my routine habits attracted the attention of the theologians, was a unique gathering. Never had such an assemblage of leading Muslim divines taken place since the time Islam came to India. And, unless I am greatly mistaken, never in Islam's entire history of thirteen centuries had a meeting of theologians of so representative a character taken place anywhere in the world. After half a century of Khalafat-i-Bashidah, during which the liberty-loving Arabs functioned in what was for those times a near approach to a democratic way of life, the Umayyids began to function as virtual despots. At no time was it considered necessary by the temporal rulers of men to convene an assembly of 'spiritual' leaders to decide any significant question of religious duty. Of course synods were convened at times to secure support for secular purposes, but they would hardly supply a parallel. The object for which this assembly met, and eventually adopted the name and style of Jamiatul-Ulema-i-Hind (assembly of learned divines of India) was to consider the situation arising out of the Khilafat movement. In particular, they were to pronounce an authoritative verdict, in accordance with religious tenets, on the question of cooperation with the British authorities in India.

The gathering was the result of the efforts mainly of Abul Kalam Azad, the Ali Brothers and the leaders of Deoband and Firangi Mahal, two great centres of theology. Many an educated person in public life, who had learnt in more than half a century of British rule to think in terms of freedom of conscience, or rather freedom from religious authorities, privately deplored this come-back of the mullahs. They saw it as a reactionary step that threatened to develop into a reimposition of the oppressive authority of those whom Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and his followers of the Aligarh school had, after a strenuous struggle, driven into obscurity. For the others, who were engaged in organising a decisive struggle against British rule--a unique war in history because it was to be non-violent--the gathering of the Ulema was an important step towards the realisation of their aim. The Government was employing all means in its power, including the parading of support from certain loyal maulvis and saints or pseudo-saints, and it was essential for the advocates of non-cooperation to secure the imprimatur of united religious opinion for their revolutionary proposal.

The Jamiat endorsed the non-cooperation programme with one voice. About five hundred divines put their signature to the *fatwa* which declared all cooperation with the foreign Government a sin. This was a terrible

weapon, for it struck at the very root of the Government. If the nationalist movement sponsored by the Congress, side by side, also gathered strength, the defeat of the Government was beyond doubt. In addition to issuing the fatwa the assemblage of divines forged an organisation which, in spite of many vicissitudes and severe blows from the Government, and lately from the Muslim League, continues to function till this day. The *fatwa* of the Jamiat set the waverers thinking, for in its wake lay the danger of ostracism of some sort as punishment for defiance. After growing a beard under the circumstances described, I felt that Bond Street suits and fancy shoes were out of place. Gandhiji had already made homespun the badge of the new outlook. But there was no Khaddar shop in Delhi at the time. I mentioned my difficulty to my mother. She said that homespun and handwoven was available in our own home, in the form of the cloth spread over the floor. She demurred at first to my proposal of using that floor-cover, but agreed after some persuasion. But when she sat down to cut my clothes out of it, I saw in her face a glow of emotion and of mental torment, and the tears welled up and began to flow. It cut me to the quick. When I sought to soothe her, speaking in a husky voice because I was overcome by emotion myself, she said: "During these thirty-two years I have fancied nothing but the finest material, silk and all, fit for your wear. And now I have to make your clothes out of coarse homespun stuff which even the servants would not dream of wearing. This is the writing of *kismet*." I met her with examples of Ashab-i-Suffa, the Prophet's poverty-stricken companions. I had already given up everything connected with the western mode of living--wine first of all--except books and furniture, which was sparse enough in my bachelor's suite in the Kucha Chelan house.

Some of the Muslims of Delhi hailed this transformation with a demonstration of which I was entirely unworthy. It seemed a great thing to many that one who had been at the top of fashion until yesterday had renounced everything and put himself on a level with the poorest of the poor. Wasn't that a miracle? They surrounded me in a mosque where I went to say my Friday prayers, and the more emotional of them kissed my hands.

### **Towards a Self-Governing Society**

Resuming his account of the genesis and course of Non-cooperation, Asaf Ali describes the circumstances of his thinking out and publishing, under the title 'Constructive Non-cooperation', a scheme for rendering the British colonial administration redundant by the people governing themselves as far as possible through rural and urban Panchayats. Asaf Ali writes:

The Central Khilafat Committee sent round a questionnaire on the Non-cooperation programme. The Delhi Committee, which had set the ball rolling and helped in the formulation of the fourfold withdrawal, now reconsidered the entire question. The majority including Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr. Ansari came to the conclusion that the response would be very limited since several of the items were idealistic and impracticable. I was asked to draft the reply to the questionnaire in the light of this discussion.

My draft, which covered some 15 sheets and was adopted in toto, argued that:

(1) Titles, honours and honorary positions as well as Government posts were held by persons who were least susceptible to patriotic or even religious sentiment. Therefore, only an infinitesimal proportion of them would respond to the call, and the bulk would continue to cooperate with the Government. (A quarter century later, the estimate remains realistic and correct).

(2) The withdrawal of students from Government or Government-aided schools and colleges would undoubtedly evoke some response, but in the absence of other means of continuing the education of such students it would result in blasting the life-careers of the very elements of society from which patriotic conduct could be expected. (This, again, has proved true. Only two major institutions of national education--the Benaras Vidyapith and the Jamia Millia of Delhi--have survived the buffetings of the last 25 years).

(3) Boycott of law courts and suspension of practice by lawyers, it was pointed out, would not work in the absence of a parallel system of enforcing justice. Since people would not turn into angels, there had to be a system of enforcing justice.

(4) Boycott of Councils would not empty the legislatures but fill them with reactionaries. Even if the fewest voters went to the poll, the unworthy candidates would walk in. (It remains true to this day.)

(5) The rest of the Non-cooperation items, which were on the 'deferred list', were also examined. Withdrawal from the army was the penultimate item. There appeared next to no possibility of this being put to the test, for not only was the army unapproachable, the very essence of military training meant either obedience or mutiny. Since mutiny could never be non-violent, it was ruled out as an item of Non-cooperation.

(6) Finally our memorandum analysed the proposal for a 'no-tax' campaign. We recorded the view that while this would attract the largest number of enthusiasts in the beginning, its success would depend on the capacity of the people to face the processes of law and the deterrents of attachment and sale of property. If there were men--and there were bound to be several--who were ready to buy the property of the Satyagrahis who

did not pay taxes, the purpose of the campaign would be defeated.

While pointing out these difficulties, the Delhi Committee's memorandum declared that, in any case, we would leave nothing undone to work for the success of any programme that was decided upon. The Congress eventually accepted Gandhiji's four-fold Boycott programme, and the Khilafat Committee followed suit.

It was while drafting the Delhi Khilafat Committee's memorandum and thinking about the implications of the Non-cooperation programme that the idea of a positive supplement to the programme, and of forging sanctions for its success, occurred to me. For instance, a no-tax campaign could succeed if society ostracised those who volunteered to purchase the confiscated property of non-cooperators; courts of law established by the alien regime could be boycotted if an alternative system of conciliation, arbitration and award of punishment was established, etc.

Asaf Ali wrote during 1919-20 a series of articles setting out a scheme for making the people self-governing in fact if not in law, through rural and urban Panchayats of appropriate size. It was based on the ancient Indian model of territorial (village) and guild (often coinciding with caste) Panchayats, but adapted to the contemporary democratic age. The members of the Panchayats would be elected on the basis of adult franchise, by women as well as men, with no qualifying condition as to literacy or possession of property. Asaf Ali's blueprint bore a certain resemblance to the Soviets that were supposed to constitute the bedrock of the brave new Bolshevik experiment in post-Czarist Russia. The radical difference was that Asaf Ali's programme of Constructive Non-cooperation eschewed violence against or even hostile confrontation with, the established regime while the Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the capture of State power by men wedded to a creed of violence and of dictatorship in the name of the proletariat. Asaf Ali recalls:

At a Delhi provincial Congress conference early in 1920, one of the draft resolutions was intended to give effect to my 'Constructive Non-cooperation' scheme. Mohammad Ali, who was to preside, said that this meant 'deep waters', and that Gandhiji who happened to be available in Delhi to guide us, must be consulted. It was a tense moment for me. Gandhiji looked at the resolution, and heard a brief outline of my scheme. I remember his words to this day. "This is a scheme of parallel government", he said. "I don't fancy going so far yet." Later, Gandhiji read it "from cover to cover", as he said in a letter to me twenty-two years afterwards--a few months before the present imprisonment-- adding: "I did not know that you were a poet also." Apparently he read an advertisement, inside the cover, of a collection of poems I proposed to publish at the time, with the title 'The Sword of Autumn'.

Asaf Ali's scheme of radical change through peaceful and orderly means was published in 1920, by Ganesh of Madras, in time for the session of the

Indian National Congress at Nagpur in December-- 'the first Gandhian Congress' as Asaf Ali describes it. Gandhiji was, by that time, firmly at the helm of the national organisation. The president at this session was C. Vijayaraghavachariar of Salem (Tamil Nadu). Asaf Ali was a member of the drafting committee appointed by the organisers of the Nagpur Congress. He sets out in the autobiographical notes the rationale of his scheme and different reactions thereto:

Gandhi's non-cooperation had been launched and was in full swing. I wanted to fill the vacuum created by Non-cooperation with a dynamic and functioning social mechanism. The Congress did not yet have an organisation on a broadbased franchise and a regular electorate at the bottom. The Congress was well enough organised as an instrument for 'agitation', but there was no permanent electoral machinery based on adult franchise--even now the Congress electors must be habitual wearers of homespun, and pay four annas annually to qualify for the exercise of their electoral right. There was no administrative machinery for guiding, controlling and providing for the normal social needs of a self-governing society.

The Congress of 1920 did evolve a well-knit and permanent organisation to be a more active instrument of agitation. I had written my treatise several months before, and provided a rough and ready constitution and administrative machinery for a normally self-governing society which could slough off the alien Government and its institutions. I laid many models and many ideas under contribution, and adapted and grafted them on the original stem of the ancient Indian system of Panchayats (representative bodies) of peasants and citizens, and guilds of artisans and traders, with the entire adult population as my electorate. My rural and urban Panchayats and guilds rose from the base of the adult population in a pyramid, which would culminate in due time in a supreme Panchayat for the whole of India. The self-governing units at the base, and in districts and provinces along an uptapering body, would leave larger cooperation to higher units or Grand Panchayats for coordination and integration of policies. It was a modified form of Soviet structure suited to Indian conditions. At the time I had no clear notion of the Soviet constitution. Mine was an approach which grew out of nostalgic memories of the indigenous system that obtained in ancient India and continued till the pre-British period. My units had their own volunteer Police, Arbitration Courts, educational institutions, and guilds for the regulation of economic activity. My sanctions for law and order were through the social rigour of graduated ostracism. My Non-cooperation State's revenues, such as were necessary for running the voluntary society or commune, rested on cooperative ventures, and the entire social order hinged on voluntary service. It was to be a process of sloughing off the highly organised foreign government run with the aid of native mercenaries in every department.

But this could be accomplished only if the non-cooperating community organised its self-governing institutions, which in my scheme amounted to a full-fledged parallel system of government. It would, without coming into violent clash with the foreign superimposition, simply withdraw its contacts away from the outer shell and continue to function as a living whole, leaving the foreign shell dead, high and dry. The details were fairly comprehensively put in a tabloid form. I had already started a volunteer corps in Delhi, and I was developing the arbitration courts, all within the existing legal limits. Guilds were being organised, and I had other schemes in reserve.

This blueprint of Constructive Non-cooperation received some attention in limited quarters, but the mighty ones seemed to regard it as ambitious showing-off by a minor personality who was hardly to be taken seriously. And yet Principal Rudra, my old tutor and Gandhiji's friend, on one occasion complimented me on 'the first coherent and comprehensive scheme of things', particularly in respect of the section relating to Education, in which he was specially interested. Gandhiji had stimulated a new spirit of service, and in my pamphlet the ideal of service was exalted to the dignity of a new secular religion. When I presented a copy of it to the veteran Vijayaraghavacharya, president of the Congress of Nagpur, without looking in, he looked at the title 'Constructive Non-cooperation' and in his characteristically swift and critical manner snapped out, 'Contradiction in terms'. He was accompanied by Mohammad Ali at the time, and was seated in a car about to move off. I had no time to explain, but said: 'This is just what I have provided against. The contradiction is reconciled.' It was not till twelve years later that I had occasion to win his approval, on becoming better acquainted with him. And then he kept up correspondence with me until a few years before his death, a few months ago.

Asaf Ali's booklet was already out of print when he wrote these recollections in 1944. Reproduced below are extracts from the publication:

Mr. Gandhi has, with the skill of an experienced or inspired general, bravely let down the drawbridge of Non-cooperation and his clarion is momentarily calling the Indian people to pass across it into the fortress of self-respect and self-reliance. His voice has sent a thrill of hope throughout the length and breadth of India and has served to awaken the slumbering manhood of our country, dispelling the hypnotic spell of national diffidence through which Indian character has been prevented from attaining its full stature. Only those who have deliberately stopped their ears against this trumpet call are still lagging behind, otherwise the country is successfully struggling to its feet. And if brute force is not employed to crush its peacefully progressive efforts it is certain that it will within a measurable time be within the battlements of Freedom. Some, however, of our veteran



generals who have fought our battles in different fields of social and political activity with the sharp weapons of polemical rhetoric, who are skilled fencers within the walls of debating clubs and Legislative Councils, are quite honestly viewing Mr. Gandhi's tactics and strategy with growing alarm. They have even taken to openly denouncing the Non-cooperation movement. They see nothing but red ruin, anarchy, chaos in its train. It would be unfair to doubt their sincerity, but they have long been reconciled to playing the second fiddle; they have continued to bend so long that they fail to notice the stoop they have acquired; they feel national wrongs but they have little energy left in them to resist them.

The gravest charge the opponents of non-cooperation prefer against it is that it is a negative virtue, a destructive and suicidal movement. The refrain of the non-Indian critic is a very different one. He reads sinister meanings in and condemns the movement as heinous. He calls it "a disloyal and unconstitutional movement." He forgets that almost every country of Europe has waded through blood and tears to its present freedom. One should be loyal to the Absolute Truth first and to anything else afterwards. Nothing that aims at the improvement of established order can be unconstitutional from the ultimate ethical point of view.

Turning, however, to the honest critics, this humble and necessarily tentative scheme of constructive work may provide a possible basis for useful discussion. It is an attempt at furnishing the model of a simple, self-sufficient and self-respecting State, independent in all matters of internal concerns and for the present indifferent to questions of foreign relations which may remain (until such time as we are able to assume them) the concern of the power which for purposes of its own controls the defence of our country. The model State adumbrated in the following scheme must consist of the natural unit of a town or a village much on the same lines as the City Republics of ancient Greece, the modern republics of the U.S.A. or the city and the village Panchayats of India of pristine glory.

The panchayats of ancient India aimed at simple, comparatively inexpensive, and efficient administration of small units. The organisation of natural units into self-sufficient, self-governing States alone can secure peaceful progress. In a state such as this you must recognise and concede adult suffrage without any conventional and customary restrictions of sex and property. Those who have acquired actual knowledge of the masses by daily contact with them in public life will readily realise the sanity and practicability of such a suggestion. One need not address oneself to politicians and statesmen of the orthodox type for they are exhausted volcanoes; one must appeal to the fresh blood of India which is surging in all variety of waves stirred by noble aspirations. Once the basic principles of this scheme are grasped the rest is plain sailing. The following postu-

lates may be noted.

- 1) The collective will of the people is sovereign unto itself, and the State derives its delegated authority from the subjects who agree to form a State.
- 2) The Grand Panchayat or representative Assembly will consist of representatives to whom authority is delegated by the rest of the subjects to adjust individual and collective relations and to reconcile various interests for the preservation and progress of the State.
- 3) The Sevak is a subject who voluntarily offers his services to the State. In theory all the subjects are Sevaks but those who serve the State in any capacity, from a Panch downwards, will be designated as Sevaks. We may moderately remunerate the services of some of the more needy ones.

In ancient India a system was devised and jealously maintained for comparatively inexpensive and honest adjustment of human relations. This mode of settling disputes of all description, reconciling contradictory interests, guarding individual liberty, preserving the sanctity of conventions and customs essential to the maintenance of the social fabric, enforcing ethical conduct by constant and close vigilance, in short controlling and regulating the progress of human society has come down to us by the name Panchayat. It has been all but extinguished by the aggressive growth of a system which has gradually taken the control of all affairs out of the hands of self-governing units of our society, and has by removing the centre of activity to a place outside such units, sapped the self-relying instinct of individuals. By securing them the dubious advantage of doing for them what they should have done for themselves, it has created in them a disastrous sense of ease and comfort calculated to undermine the foundations of character. It is a matter of common experience today that men who would sooner die than be found guilty of mendacity by a Panchayat, are woefully lax in the observance of veracity in the modern courts of law. The evil is easily explained. In a highly centralised state a close scrutiny of individual morals must necessarily be an impossibility. Under the monarchical system (of which India has had no little experience) while Kings plunged their mercenaries into deadly struggles the people continued to govern themselves by Panchayats. Today although the nervous centre of Government is highly elaborate and fully active, the extremities are left cold and are dying of gradual atrophy. It is therefore incumbent on society to leave the present Government to its own management and reorganise itself along lines of self-determination; divide itself into small and easily manageable units; render each unit self-reliant, vigilant and progressive; reassume the control of its own affairs and be sovereign within its own sphere. As all rights and duties, in the first instance, devolve equally upon all the adult members of society, all of them without sex or

property qualifications should form the sovereign body. All men and women are born free and equal and must enjoy the right to conduct themselves as they please so long as they do not infringe the freedom of others. The delegation of authority must be by majority and the exercise of delegated authority must be the subject of the most jealous scrutiny by the subjects.

Every town or village is a natural unit, and has the duty of organising itself if it is to be a living and active organism. The proportion of Panches or elected representatives to adult voters of a natural unit must be determined by each unit in accordance with its needs--simple and few as they must be in the case of villages, and complex as they are bound to be in the case of big towns such as Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Delhi, Lucknow and Lahore. In such units as those just enumerated, it would not be wrong to have one Panch to every one thousand electors but the proportion may be varied according to specific circumstance.

The first step which every unit must take should be to convene a mass meeting on a convenient day, hour and place, so as to afford every adult member of the unit an opportunity to participate in the deliberations of the meeting. Objections are bound to be raised as to the impracticability of an assemblage adequate in number to lend weight and representative character to its conclusions. But as the only decision it is to record will be the formation of a Provisional or Arzi Panchayat with authority to arrange and supervise the election of the Grand Panchayat or the Bari Panchayat, no one need feel any qualms of conscience if the assemblage does not actually amount to a meeting of every adult resident of the place. But care should be exercised by conveners of the meeting to secure both the largest possible assemblage of the adult population, and as far as practicable the unanimity of the audience as regards the election of the Provisional Panches.

The public assembly should elect as many Arzi Panches as there may be divisions in the unit. The Provisional Panchayats shall have the power delegated to them by the public meeting, in the form of a resolution, to organise and supervise the election of the Grand Panchayat. They should immediately after their election proceed to entrust to every Panch the responsibility of preparing the electoral roll of each ward, on the basis of adult suffrage and with the assistance of voluntary workers, within a fortnight.

The Panch in charge of the preparation of the electoral roll in a ward should within two days take steps for adequate publication of a notice by beat of drum, the town crier or by detailing volunteers for house to house publication, also by means of posters and placards, that all adult residents should have their names registered in the electoral roll and obtain the elector's certificate. The registration of women voters should be entrusted

to some respectable Pardahnashin lady, if necessary, in accordance with the specific needs of a constituency. Difficulties may be experienced in securing a sufficiency of literate workers in rural areas; but they may be met by borrowing the services of workers from neighbouring towns. Nor is it presumed that the first electoral roll will be as adequate or flawless as it should be; for, the brief electoral rolls now prepared by bureaucratic agents have hardly a page which is free from wrong entries.

On the 15th day registration should cease and registers should be submitted for scrutiny by the Provisional Panchayat. After this, the Provisional Panchayat should proceed to fix a day for election within a fortnight of the publication of the rectified electoral roll.

Candidates for election should obtain printed forms of application from the office of the Provisional Panchayat and they should be supported by a minimum of 10 voters in small units and 25 or 35 in larger units. All applications must be personally presented to the President of the Provisional Panchayat, who after checking the qualifications of the candidates will have the names of eligible ones posted in a prominent place. The Provisional Panchayat should within a week of the publication of the names of eligible candidates fix a day, time and place for general elections in all the divisions of the area, and appoint Returning Officers from among the Provisional Panchayat. On the conclusion of voting the Returning Officer should count the votes in front of the candidates, and declare the one getting the majority of votes elected.

As soon as elections have reached the final stage the Provisional Panchayat shall convene a public meeting of all the electors to delegate to the duly elected Panches full authority to take whatever steps may be necessary to protect, preserve, adjust, reconcile and improve the rights and interests of all the electors for a period of three or five years, and to have full authority to make rules and regulations for the conduct of the Panchayat's business, and also to pass decrees which should be binding on the electorate. These decrees may embrace the widest field of human activity, scrupulous care being taken not to let the people come into conflict with the existing system of government. This provision contemplates successful self-organisation along lines of peaceful cessation of all co-operation with the present Government.

The only sanction for obedience to the Panchayat's decrees must necessarily be Social and Political Ostracism. The entire administration must, in virtue of its higher aim, be informed by a spirit of toleration and conciliation for the greater happiness of the individual and the community. Punishments must be confined to (1) Ostracism and (2) Dand or fine.

Social ostracism is, in a sense, a more deterrent curtailment of privileges and rights than the mere curtailment of the subject's personal liberty. Its enforcement, however, can be managed by small units only, and that is

why there is need for parcelling out large populations into small and manageable divisions. It secures a vigilant control and discipline of individuals, which cannot but ultimately result in increased good. Ostracism may be partial or complete. It might mean the suspension of the enjoyment of all ordinary relations with the remaining members of society. Merchants and trades people should not sell to such offenders, sweepers should not scavenge their houses, water-carriers should cease to supply them water, and every other member of the various orders of society with whom they daily deal should stop all dealings with the ostracised. They should not be admitted to relations of any description. The degree of ostracism may be determined by the gravity of the offence, and excessive forms should be reserved only for grave offences.

The Grand Panchayat elected in the manner specified will naturally be entitled to every elector's respect and obedience. The Panches will, in public estimation, be associated with the hoariest traditions of India, and on this account carry a certain nimbus of authority and reverence round their heads. Their decrees will appeal to the public imagination, restore a sense of self-respect and engender a spirit of self-reliance. The dubious facilities provided by the present system have, besides emasculating people's self-respecting instincts, robbed them of the power of initiative. Once they have performed the wonder of organising themselves without any outside aid, they will be a different people, claiming their birthright of equality with the rest of the world's population.

Any individual member of the Grand panchayat may be called upon to resign on the majority of his electors signing a petition of censure, and a fresh election shall be ordered. The Grand Panchayat may sit from day to day, but it shall meet at least twice a month. It may consider all problems affecting the general welfare of the people. The object of its deliberations should be 'no violent conflict with the present system, but peaceful self-organisation.'

On being constituted, the Grand Panchayat shall proceed to elect its office-bearers and frame rules for the conduct of its business. It shall elect one President or Sar-Panch, one Vice-President or Naib-Sar-Panch, and Secretaries or Mantris. Of the latter there shall be:

(1) The Mantri in charge of Law and Justice who will represent the guardian of Truth or Satya.

(2) The Mantri in charge of Education--academical, political and social--will represent the guardian of Light or Jyot.

(3) The Mantri in charge of volunteers or Sevaks shall be responsible for Peace and Order, and will represent the guardian of Strength or Bal.

(4) The Mantri in charge of the financial interests of the Panchayat and the electorate will have to watch and improve the commercial and industrial or agricultural development of the Panchayat-state according as

it is an urban or a rural one. He will represent the guardian of prosperity or Chain. One who has not attained the age of 25 will not be eligible as a Panch, and none who has not attained the age of 30 is to be elected a Mantri. Each department will have a minimum staff to carry on its work. Each Secretary should initiate legislation in the Grand Panchayat for the establishment of his department with all requisite complements. Arbitration Courts, Volunteer Corps, Public Health Boards, Industrial Guilds, Commercial Panchayats, Conciliation Boards, National Schools and Colleges, Polytechnic Institutes, Poor Houses and all necessary institutions must rapidly spring up under the fostering care of these Mantris. In rural units, Arbitration Panchayats, Co-operative Panchayats and Boards of Agriculture should be formed. National Education and indigenous industries should be encouraged and zealously promoted.

*Justice:* Our time-honoured and simple form of dispensing justice in village, guild or family panchayats is free from the bewildering 'conflict of laws' and forensic sophistry and casuistry which not infrequently circumvent and defeat justice. The vast avenues of legal and therefore moral perversions of the present system can be closed to the litigant public by diverting them from the evil nests which breed refined perjurers to representative Arbitration Courts or guild and caste Panchayats where they may get "simple and speedy" justice in Mr. Gandhi's words.

*Peace and Order:* So long as a well organised and strong federation does not become an established fact, no energy should be expended on problems of external defence. But every self-governing unit should be equipped with a body of volunteers, who may be a guarantee against internal disorder. With this in view the Mantri responsible for Order should proceed to entrust to each Panch the duty of enlisting Sevaks for police duty. Each ward should have a prescribed number of volunteers, who should be recruited from among able-bodied electors of between 18 and 45 years of age to serve for a specified period, say for the life of the Grand Panchayat. But provision should be made for every willing elector of specified age to receive training along with those enlisted for service during the Panchayat's tenure of office. It is essential in the interests of self-respect and self-development that our people should conform to strict discipline. The object of all military training (which need not necessarily mean drill with arms and which for our purposes excludes all reference to arms or weapons of any description) is to discipline the mind of the soldier, to make him conform to a rigid course of conduct which knows no wavering and no fear. It is the creation of such a spirit that all the training of the Volunteers and other willing electors should aim at.

*Education:* If the aim is not the formation of character, and the calling forth of what is best in the individual, education is worthless, perhaps even sinful.

The Mantri for education should organise academical and polytechnic institutions aided by contributions to be mobilised by the Grand Panchayat.

For the present the medium of instruction should primarily be provincial vernaculars in the lower and English in the higher departments of instruction but the acquisition of Hindustani or Urdu written in the Deonagiri script should be regarded as compulsory all over India. This means trilingual instruction; but there is no other alternative until there has been accumulated ample Hindustani literature relative to both Arts and Sciences for Hindustani to become a substitute for English, which we have all been compulsorily made to learn. Nor should there be any objection to the adoption of the Deonagiri script which may be alien to Madras and Moslem India, for after all we have not learnt English in any but an alien script. If we succeed in acquiring Hindustani as a vehicle for the communication of our ideas, as soon as an adequate store of necessary literature is available we shall naturally drop English, and bring up the next generation in the knowledge of provincial vernaculars and Hindustani. However, it would be a folly to proscribe English, with its rich modern literature which has proved a source of inspiration to most of our leading men today.

Since the only all-India national assembly is the Indian National Congress, whose mandates are daily becoming binding on the entire country, it will be well advised to appoint a Text Book Committee to prescribe suitable curricula. For some time to come there will be very little need for altering the current curricula except in respect to history. If Patshalas and Makhtabs are resuscitated in accordance with the reformed modern system of instruction, there is no reason why education cannot be made cheaper, more practical and altogether more useful, by which every individual may be made a self-respecting, self-supporting unit of the nation, instead of degenerating into an invertebrate slave fit only to drudge away at an obscure desk in a litter of red-tape.

**Finance:** Every human organisation must have a moral as well as a material bond between its various parts. The organisation of our self-governing State primarily depends upon moral forces. But in the present state of our society when ideal conditions are only conceivable and not real, we cannot overlook the 'material nexus' by which the organisation should be secured against disruption. We shall require money for propaganda, and for many other needs. Although every subject of the state must in theory at least be a Sevak, the unequal distribution of property, which is a solid reality to-day, leaves the largest number of Sevaks in a condition somehow to shift for themselves. We must, therefore, create a Baitul-mal or the Panchayat treasury which should supply the Panchayat with the necessary financial sinews for enabling an equitable adjustment

of the more needy Scvaks' economic condition, specially in the case of wholetime workers. The old rural units still maintain their village chowkidar, *kameras* (workmen) and others with moderate compensations in kind.

Again, the Baitul-mal or the Panchayat fund should provide for the infirm and incapacitated poor. Poor houses should be organised by the Mantri, and means should be devised to make able-bodied pauperism impossible. No subject of the state should be suffered to be a parasite. Everyone must work for his livelihood, and it should be the special care of the Mantri for Finance to find channels for directing the reserve energy of able-bodied paupers. There should be established in every town and village small handloom factories, or other easily learned industries, for this purpose. And public opinion should be trained so as to extinguish the evil of beggary altogether.

From where and how should the Mantri get the necessary funds? We have already visualised the entire electorate being parcelled out into so many wards, and each ward into so many professional, commercial and industrial or agriculture *bradris* or guilds. Each *bradri* will have its own Sub-panchayat with a Sarpanch. Panchayat-ka-chanda or Panchayat contributions should be the first source of revenue. Taxes, duties and tolls have a somewhat obnoxious savour about them, as they are associated in the public mind with impositions and levies imposed by despots and autocrats. In France all taxes are known by the term 'contributions' and taxpayers are those who contribute to the public funds of the state. In our villages in the North of India, such contributions are known by the term Dhala, which may be proportionate or uniform. Similarly the Grand Panchayat may budget the annual expenses of the State and vote a Dhala, Chanda or contribution, which the Mantri should realise (1) through the various guilds and sub-panchayats and (2) individually from those who are not embraced under (1). This should be the direct source.

The minor sources of revenue may be Dand or fine realisable from offenders. Court fees charged by the Panchayat arbitration bodies, voluntary contributions, the income of the Panchayat postal service for local purposes, the Panchayat local-carrier service, etc. A word is necessary about the institution of a Panchayat Postal Service for local requirements. After all, the postal system for carrying private letters and parcels is not the monopoly of anyone, any more than the railway system is for carrying men and goods from place to place or the telephone system is for communication. It is a wonder that capitalists of our country have so far neglected this enterprise. There seems no reason why every Panchayat should not organise its own postal service with the help of Scvaks. It will prove an indirect source of revenue.



The Panchayat may organise its own industries, and train and employ artisans, the profits of whose output should be equitably distributed between the individual and the State. This should prove another indirect source of revenue. In rural areas the institution of Co-operative Banks and societies for improving our agricultural output should result in increased prosperity and yield a contribution to the common fund for the benefit of each self-governing rural unit.

**THE OUTLOOK:** Our model States are now in full working order. They are quite independent of the other system which exists side by side with them. They have scrupulously avoided courses of action that may lead to a collision. They have thinned the stream of litigants flowing into the existing courts of law. They have proved the redundancy of the entire machinery which, it is claimed, is for the maintenance of order and peace. They have assumed the control of education, and have shown no little initiative in organising indigenous industries, and controlling local commerce. They have lifted individuals out of poverty, squalor, diffidence, despondency and supineness. And in doing all this they have followed nothing but the most peaceful and constitutional methods. Their achievement, however, is not tainted by association and co-operation with those who claim to be masters and Rulers. That is all the difference between the position taken up by the advocates of Non-cooperation and their opponents. And it makes all the difference in terms of self-respect and self-reliance.

The next step before these self-governing units is to assemble their duly elected representatives, say their Presidents, first in Provincial Conferences, where a prescribed number of delegates may be elected to the All India Congress to forge bonds of a unique Indian Federation. The constitution and organisation of our new India with absolute Swaraj will be complete when we enter into treaties with our present rulers the English, but in a different capacity. In all this scheme of self-determination not one chance is conceivable or contemplated to mar the peacefully progressive realisation of India's destiny as a self-respecting nation of non-violent individuals.

If such a scheme of self-determination, rigorously eliminating as it does all chances of anarchy, chaos and confusion, is branded as disloyal and unconstitutional, then India loses nothing. If England suffers her bureaucratic representatives in India to thwart this movement by using all the disreputable weapons in the armoury of coercion and repression, England will write herself down as a champion of Brute Force.

The vision of the Future is burning with all the effulgence and splendour of the Sun. India is set to achieve her highest destiny.

## Nagpur Congress, 1920

Asaf Ali had hoped to carry forward the story of his life and times much further, but the autobiography he started writing in Ahmadnagar Fort prison concludes abruptly with an account of the Nagpur Congress session of December 1920. This regular annual Congress confirmed the decision taken earlier in the year, at a special session in Calcutta, to launch the Non-cooperation programme drawn up by Gandhiji. Asaf Ali writes:

The Nagpur sessions of the Congress and of the Muslim League in December 1920 were drawing near. Ansari was to preside over the League's session, and had been busy writing his address. One day he sent for me, gave me his speech in manuscript, and invited suggestions. It flattered me that he had confidence in my judgment. It was a fine, eloquent and inspiring address. But I felt that the peroration would gain if it rose above the framework of League policies and Muslim or even nationalist politics. "Write it out", he said, and I did. He was generous enough to adopt it *in toto*.

Then came the day for the Delhi delegates to leave for Nagpur. Hakim Sahib, Ansari, Peareylal and myself were in one compartment. Hakim Sahib had not adopted Khaddar yet, nor had Ansari. A couple of stops before Nagpur, Hakim Sahib suddenly turned to me and in a sweetly familiar tone asked if I had a spare shirt and cap of khaddar. I could spare a complete outfit of Khaddar except an *achkan*, for I had reduced my wearing apparel to a shirt and pyjama and a *chadar*. Hakim Sahib was slightly heavier than myself but my garments were loose enough to fit him. We were received by the League's reception committee because we were of the President-elect's party. But Peareylal and I slipped away to our tent in the 'European camp' of the Congress. Until then it had been the practice to set apart in the Congress camp a 'European section' meant for the unorthodox, where one could get non-vegetarian food. This was my fourth Congress, and I had come to know a good many persons. It was one of the liveliest Congresses I have ever attended. There were extraordinary scenes of Hindu-Muslim fraternisation. Of about 14,500 delegates, more than 1000 were Muslims. Industrial and art exhibitions, and various other conferences, took advantage of the assembly of such a large number of leading men and women from all over India.

Surendranath Banerji and his band of Liberals had left the Congress two years earlier and formed the Liberal Federation. This was a progressive but moderate body of politicians, whose ability and personal distinction are their claim to being heard, even if not followed. It is a tragedy, for they are undoubtedly some of the ablest in India. The sincerity and patriotism of most of those in the front rank of the Liberals is beyond doubt. Also inclined towards the Liberal position was C.R. Das, of whose friendship I was proud. He had rented a small bungalow for his party (more than 250

delegates accompanied him, costing him some Rs.38,000/-), including J M. Sen Gupta, his right - hand man. Das had not taken very kindly to Gandhiji's programme. He was busy preparing an amendment, to test his influence. Madras and Maharashtra, besides Bengal, were not happy over Non-cooperation. They were for using the newly constituted Councils and Assemblies. Lajpatrai, Madan Mohan Malviya, Jinnah--a prominent Congressman up to that year--were all opposed to the Non- cooperation programme. Even the veteran Vijayaraghavachariar, the President-elect of the Nagpur session, was not favourably disposed to it. But the general body of the delegates was for Gandhiji. The Muslims for their part were most enthusiastic. They were closely watching the Egyptian example: the boycott of the Milner mission, and the wave of national upheaval that was sweeping over Egypt with the cry of complete independence in the air. The treaty of Sevres that had been imposed on Turkey raised the indignation of Muslims to white heat. The Hunter Committee's majority report, which white-washed the Jallianwala and Punjab atrocities, added fresh fuel to the fire. Eventually Gandhiji struck some sort of a compromise which secured the support of C.R. Das to the main resolution.

According to the old constitution of the Congress the election of members to the Subjects Committee was to take place after the presidential address. I was a little excited about it, for this was going to be my first subjects committee. I had been baulked of it in 1918, and was prevented by illness from participating in it in 1919. My friends, particularly Peareyial, were happy that at last I was participating in a forum which made or marred reputations. I found my opportunity immediately after Commander Wedgwood, a fraternal delegate from the British Labour Party, delivered his speech. He had obtained special permission to address the Subjects Committee, and he sounded a serious, and I now feel a sincere, warning against Non-cooperation. He apologised for 'the reptile Press' (Anglo-Indian) which was decrying and libelling patriotic Indians, and sought to assuage the wounded susceptibilities of India. But he maintained that the Non-cooperation programme was impracticable, and that the fourfold boycott was nothing short of going into the wilderness.

Enthusiasm for Non-cooperation had reached a high pitch, and the delegates were impatient of advice from any member of the imperialist race. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya (now a co-detenu with me) was the first to jump up to join issue with Wedgwood. I followed him or perhaps one more speaker, and put in a vigorous caveat. What I said must have been on familiar lines, but my language and delivery attracted attention. I saw Ben Spoor, another fraternal British delegate, smile in a conciliatory manner and shake his head to indicate that things were not quite that bad. I emphasised my point by saying: "The honourable gentleman may shake his head, but there are facts which we feel in the marrow of our bones." I

resumed my seat amid applause.

My booklet entitled 'Constructive Non-cooperation' had been published by Ganesh of Madras and was on sale at the stalls. I had myself brought out its Urdu translation entitled *Ain-i- Jamburiat* (Principles of Democracy) and it was also on sale. How many copies Ganesh sold I do not know, but about 160 copies of the Urdu version were bought by delegates. Some complimented me on it, but the bigwigs just raised their brows. (Gandhiji read it only 22 years later). 'Asaf Ali Trial' was also on display. My inclusion in the "Leaders' Calendar" was flattering, but I was only too conscious of the fact that I was among the small fry.

The Nagpur Congress presented a heart-warming sight. Thousands of Khaddar-clad delegates wearing what had come to be described as the Gandhi cap (it was really a Rampuri cap) walked to the immense Pandal designed to seat 50,000 persons, with papers and reports under their arms. It was a trek of the dispossessed to claim their own land. The flush of hope and the glow of pride lit up every brow. Oh! for a breath of that air once again before one dies. The scenes of communal fraternisation were a sight for the gods. Hindu and Muslim went out of the way to embrace, conciliate and befriend the other. If unity were the only condition of India's freedom, India was free then--free of fear of the foreigner, and free of mutual distrust.

### **Baptism of Imprisonment**

Asaf Ali was to undergo his baptism of imprisonment in the freedom struggle in December 1921, within a year of the Nagpur Congress. Earlier, in August 1920, he had given up his legal practice in accordance with the Non-Cooperation programme which included boycott of the law courts of the British regime. The last case in which he appeared before renouncing practice was the second of two court martial trials in which he acted as the defence counsel. Asaf Ali's account of these trials is of interest, and even more so his recall of the conflict between the dictates of prudence and of idealism which culminated in his decision to give up law practice:

Somehow my professional work was multiplying in spite of my political preoccupation. I was commanding good fees. Rs.100 per day was more than good in 1920 for a junior of barely eight years' standing. I got my first court-martial brief during this period. It was a case of alleged insubordination by a British NCO (I don't mean a Non-cooperator). His Commanding Officer was an irascible old Colonel, and was the complainant. I was not sure how the court consisting of three officers would treat legal niceties. But I found them easy to work with. The moment they saw a properly robed Barrister, a whisper to the Prosecuting officer, a handsome Irishman by name Hanrahan, resulted in a table and a chair

being arranged on the left and right of the court. The accused Non Commissioned Officer was allowed to sit beside his Defence Counsel (myself) to give instructions.

After the examination of the first prosecution witness by the prosecuting officer, I knew that I had an easy case and a fair and patient court. My cross-examination of the old Colonel, who by arrangement appeared last, was searching and decimating. He had been in the habit of snapping at all subordinates in an offensive way. He demurred at my questions about some antecedent facts which were necessary for the defence. Turning to the President, he asked: "Who is on trial--I or the accused?" The good-natured Major turned to me and said: "Surely the Colonel is not on his trial." But I could see that the officers were far from displeased, and this was only a polite concession to the old man. I pointed out that none, howsoever high, could come into a court of law with a complaint without exposing himself to counter charges impinging on his bona fides. The C.O. was angry but helpless, and my quick firing continued. By the time I finished, my client was saying to me: "God bless you, I have had my own back. I don't care now even if I am convicted. By Jove, the old ...will henceforward keep a civil tongue in his head." The NCO was, however, honourably acquitted at the end of the day.

A curious thing happened earlier, during the lunch interval. Hanrahan came to me and volunteered a statement that he was throwing up his job and going back to Ireland. "But why?", I asked him. He was a Sinn Féiner, and said he could no longer tolerate the ways of the British. I began to wonder whether they were trying a decoy on me. But he went on: "Surely, you are a nationalist, and you will understand. I read the papers, and I have been following the reports of your speeches in the *Eastern Mail* (now defunct). Are you not the same Mr. Asaf Ali?" Later I learnt that Hanrahan did actually resign his commission and went back to Ireland.

My next court martial case was my last before I suspended practice in August 1920 during the Non-cooperation movement. It was a general court martial, with Colonel Arbuthnot as President. The trial lasted 18 days, for there were no less than 18 counts in the indictment. I managed to riddle 16 counts with reasonable doubt, and the rest got my client two years--later reduced in appeal to six months. It was a memorable case for me, for I was getting into the swing of a flourishing forensic career and was giving it up in obedience to the call of Congress and Khilafat Non-cooperation. My last month's earnings touched Rs.2700/-. At the end of the trial, when I went up to Col. Arbuthnot after the court had risen, to say goodbye, and he learnt that it was my last case, he said: "Then you must have made your fortune and retired." "No", I smiled and said: "I have marred my fortune and retired." When he learnt the reason, he said with an expression of admiring deference: "You are the first living non-

cooperator we have seen, although one reads so much about Non-cooperation in the newspapers."

Mushirul Hasan says in his biography of Ansari (p.26), drawing on material from the Home Department's files of that period, that Asaf Ali organised a strike in the Government Press, Delhi. He led the volunteers trained by him to picket shops dealing in foreign cloth. It is stated in the official records that, as part of the boycott of the elections to the Councils held under the Government of India Act of 1919, Asaf Ali "practised general intimidation through his volunteers at polling stations, and organised a partial social boycott of candidates."

There was a reported incident of attempted denial of burial to a cooperator who had died. According to Asaf Ali, the Khilafat volunteers had nothing to do with it. There is a reference to this episode by Gandhiji. Writing in *Young India* of 22nd December 1920, he praised the women of India for their donation of jewellery for the non-cooperation movement, and their understanding that "the purity of the poor women of India is hidden in the music of the spinning wheel". "But the men", he said, "are impatient and grievously err as they are reported to have done at Delhi and in Bengal. It was cruel and sinful to deny the rights of burial to the corpse of a man whom the so-called non-cooperators (if they were non-cooperators) disliked. It was filthy to throw, at a place in East Bengal, nightsoil on a candidate who had stood for election as a Council member, or to cut the ears of a voter for daring to exercise his vote. These are just the ways of defeating our own purpose. Non-cooperation is non-violent not merely in regard to the Englishmen and Government officials. It has to be equally so as between ourselves. A cooperator is as much entitled to freedom of action, speech and thought as the tallest among non-cooperators." Gandhiji would castigate such misconduct as Duragraha or criminal disobedience, in contrast to Satyagraha or civil disobedience.

The Delhi incident referred to by Gandhiji was probably the subject of a telegram of 10th December 1920 from Asaf Ali: "Your Khilafat workers falsely charged with offering indignity to human corpse. Supposed complainant notified authorities unwillingness to prosecute, but authorities appear obdurate as case cognizable. Since complaint originally filed by individual we are anxious to know whether we should advise accused to defend their honour against unscrupulous false allegations. May we disobey Government's order to disband volunteer corps?" Gandhiji replied: "Order disbandment must be obeyed. No lawyers can be engaged for defence." (Government courts were at that time under boycott as part of the non-cooperation programme.)

Following Asaf Ali's arrest along with others in Delhi, and of many more elsewhere, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India* of 15th December 1921: "That many of the best of us are in jail is Swaraj...I give below the list of the biggest prisoners I could think of as having won their spurs during the past few days..." The list was by city and province, and it is noteworthy that all the seven mentioned by

Gandhiji under Ajmer are Muslims. Under Delhi he gives the names of Shankarlal and Asaf Ali, and adds: "I have given the names from memory. The list is not exhaustive, I know; it may not be even fully representative. It is, however, sufficiently illustrative of the temper of the country. It is to me an eloquent demonstration of the fitness of the country for swaraj if my standard be accepted, viz., those who are prepared to suffer are the fittest for self-government."

In the next issue of *Young India* (22nd December 1921), Gandhiji writes: "To show the thorough nature of the work of ensuring peace that is being done in Delhi, I extract the following remarkable pledge from Mr. Asaf Ali's letter which he wrote when he offered himself and fifty-two others for arrest:

With full consciousness of the omnipresence and omniscience of God, I declare that it shall be my solemn duty: (1) to attain swaraj by peaceful means; (2) to preserve and foster unity between the members and followers of the various communities and religions of India; (3) to regard no class or community as contemptible or untouchable; (4) to sacrifice life and property for the honour and interests of my country; (5) to wear clothes made of cloth hand-spun and hand-woven in the country; (6) to obey without demur the orders of the officers; (7) so long as I am not discharged from the (Volunteer) Corps, to observe myself and persuade others to observe non-violence (for as long as the Congress continues to follow this policy); and (8) finally, I will cheerfully bear privations and troubles which may confront me during my connection with the National Volunteer Corps and neither I nor any of my dependents and relations expect any compensation."

Again, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India* of 9th February 1922, under the caption 'From Delhi Jail': "Mr. Asaf Ali writes a descriptive letter from the Delhi Jail. I copy from it extracts of public interest: ...it is a matter of no little surprise to me that my health has appreciably improved since my incarceration... the discomforts of prison life will be throughout our lives the most cherished of our memories, like the scars of warriors... Kindly remember me to Pandit Motilalji and Jawahar if you write to them, as I cannot, and please give my love to my Akka, I mean Mrs Sarojini Naidu."

In the course of a letter of 4th January 1922 from prison, Asaf Ali writes to Gandhiji:

I shall feel much obliged if you will be so kind as to cause a letter to be written to Dr. Rabindranath Tagore informing him that I regret my that pilgrimage to 'Swaraj Ashram' was too suddenly planned to leave me time to send my translation of his 'King of the Dark Chamber' to the publishers. I fear it will have to wait till my return from the 'Jatra'. There is a vacant cell next to the one I occupy. They hang a light in it every evening and take it down the next morning. Strange shadows play under that light as it awaits the arrival of the occupant who daily cheats the cell. If often

reminds me of a poem of Robi Babu in which the solitary inhabitant of a hut daily garnishes and lights her dwelling, and with tears in her eyes waits through the night for the arrival of her lord. What a grand subject the poet would have in the cold, wind-swept, dimly lighted cell next door which is daily got ready for an ever expected arrival. At night the lonely bars lengthen their shadows at cross angles and paint ghosts of lattice-screens on the ground and the walls. The watch, as he paces his beat up and down, shouts 'all right' and awakens echoes all over the place. Who knows what lover of liberty is to be the inmate of this empty cell!

But as I change my viewpoint and look at it from another angle, it appears to me a verisimilitude of life. In this great goal the Universe, there stands the empty cell of our Earth, ever ready to receive the new-born 'prisoner'. Shadows of Destiny dance in the prison-house to receive the victim, and close in upon him when he arrives. With every breath Life, the Warder, cries 'all right'. The prisoner fills the cell with his laughter, or sobs and sighs, according as his condition moves him.

### **Upsurge of Islamism**

The Moplah uprising of August 1921 must have caused Asaf Ali misgiving even prior to his first imprisonment, which lasted a year and half from 12th December 1921. The unprecedented fraternisation between Hindus and Muslims that had been witnessed in Delhi and elsewhere since 1919, and at the Nagpur Congress of December 1920, proved to be without an enduring basis. The euphoria evaporated, and was followed by a backlash of Hindu-Muslim conflict that continued for many years after Asaf Ali's release on 11th June 1923 from the jail at Mian Wali in Punjab where he had been held.

That Malabar on the south-western coast of India should have been the starting point of the conflict is significant. It was an area where pan-Islamic feeling had been running high well before the Khilafat movement. M.N. Das recalls that the Viceroy, Lord Minto, ordered in March 1907 an all-India survey of Hindu-Muslim relations and of the attitude of the two communities towards the British Government in India, in the context of the partition of Bengal and the agitation against it. The report from Arthur Lawley, Governor of Madras Presidency, said that "in the Muppilla country... every Mohammadan who could afford it made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Moreover there was a constant flow, back and forth, of Arabian merchants who visited the west coast and lived, sometimes for months together, among their Indian co-religionists. The doctrine of Pan-Islamism found ever-growing favour and was influencing the Mohammedans of those parts to an increasing dislike of all--Europeans or Indians--who were not followers of the Prophet."

When the Khilafat movement reached Malabar, the Muslims there committed atrocities not only on officials of the administration but on their Hindu



neighbours. A British official of the time wrote: "Muslim feelings ran high ever since the Majlis-ul-Ulema conference at Erode in April. They resorted to the only form of Jihad which they could understand. The principal feature of this rebellion was its religious aspect and the forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam. One of their leaders said: 'We shall give Hindus the option of death or Islam... The Jews and Christians, as believers in a revealed book, may be tolerated, but the idolatrous Hindus can only be allowed to live in a Muslim State on sufferance.'"4

Hindu-Muslim riots spread all over the country, reaching as far as Kohat on the north-west frontier in September 1924. By a bitter irony, the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements yielded a harvest of communal hatred instead of Hindu support to the Khilafat cause cementing Hindu-Muslim unity. As noted earlier, Gandhiji called off the Non-cooperation movement in February 1922 following mob violence at the village of Chauri Chaura near Gorakhpur in the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). He asked Congressmen to take to constructive work instead. This made many Muslims feel that they had been let down. But the bottom had been knocked out of the Khilafat cause itself when the Turkish National Assembly, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, abolished the Sultanate in November 1920. What remained of the institution of Khalif, as a purely religious head with no political power, was also done away with in March 1924.

Gandhiji did not regret his decision to espouse the cause of Khilafat. In a lengthy and considered article in *Young India* (29th May 1924), he recapitulated the Hindu and Muslim complaints against the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements. Many Hindus said that Muslims had been awakened and unified under the influence of fanatical Maulvis. Several Muslims felt aggrieved that even the few young men of their community who were studying at the Aligarh College, or were members of the provincial legislative councils, had been withdrawn. Declaring himself 'totally unrepentant', Gandhiji wrote: "Had I been a prophet and foreseen all that has happened, I should still have thrown myself into the Khilafat agitation.. The awakening among the masses...is itself a tremendous gain. I would do nothing to put the people to sleep again. Our wisdom consists now in directing the awakening in the proper channel."

One of the proper channels appeared to Asaf Ali to be participation in elections to the provincial councils and the Central Legislative Assembly. On emerging from prison and surveying the political scene, he came to the conclusion that the Swarajists who advocated Council entry were right. Entry into the provincial and Central legislatures, even if elected on a severely restricted franchise, would afford nationalists the opportunity of propagating their views and demands, and bringing pressure to bear on the British authorities. Boycott only resulted in the assemblies being filled by toadies and political weaklings. Asaf Ali's idea at this stage was not that Congressmen should seek or accept office, but that they should fight from within the legislatures as well as outside

them. He refers to his new political position (different from that of the No-changers who wanted to continue non-cooperation) in the course of a letter to Gandhiji early in 1924. (he had by this time resumed his law practice in order to support himself). Following is the text of the letter.

Delhi

27th February 1924

My dear Mahatmaji,

Anxious to avoid superfluous words, and to save you trouble, I content myself with assuring you that my reverence and affection for you, today, are deeper than ever. I have ever since your removal to Sassoon Hospital longed to be near you--even for a moment--but realising what would please you better, I have continued to work humbly at my post.

I have not remitted an iota of my efforts since my release but have (while fighting, with my back to the wall, against a very heavy handicap which includes ill-health and what has now become insupportable economic pressure) attempted in all humility and honesty of purpose to serve the cause of freedom and humanity according to my lights. On the lower plane of details: bitter experiences, careful thought, and perhaps also a certain degree of impatience to reach a more immediate objective, have led me into the Swarajist Camp--not to seek responsive co-operation, but to evoke intensive non-cooperation. I have patiently heard both sides and have regretfully noted much extravagance in both types of zealots. To my mind, to a true non-cooperator of the progressive school 'Swarajism' is a natural development in the direction of concentration on the more vulnerable point of the host. But I must not say more for the present.

Permit me to beg a favour of you. They have elected me President of the "Delhi Provincial Political Conference" to be held on 7th March next at Meerut (one of the Hindu-Moslem plague-spots in the North). Maulana Mohammad Ali has kindly promised to attend it. But it is my conviction that a word from you will chase the gloom which still hangs over the spirits of the people in this Province. May I, therefore, venture to beg you to send the Delhi Provincial Political Conference a message of hope and inspiration? The virulent cancer of communal distrust has found a favourable region round about Delhi. Those who are fighting it know what it is to combat a disease which is neither fatal nor incurable, but which is hourly sapping the vitals of the nation. Forgive my saying so; but the ill-disguised insincerity of most of our leaders, both Hindu and Moslem, is the sole cause of its continuance. The balm of unbounded love alone can heal this cancer; but none has offered it yet. During your absence there was not a great enough soul in our midst to spare a meed of love for those who are dying for its want today.

Let me not exceed the limits I had hoped to set to this epistle, but let me close it with deep reverence and affection.

I beg to remain, ever  
Yours respectfully,

In response to this request, Gandhiji sent the following message to the Fourth Delhi Provincial Political Conference that was held on March 7th and 8th 1924 at Meerut under the presidentship of Asaf Ali: "Your Conference has no more important work before it than the promotion of Hindu-Moslem unity. It will be like balm to my troubled heart to know that Hindu and Moslem members of the Conference have resolved, with God as witness, never to distrust each other but are prepared to die for one another. May God guide you all right."

But, instead of improving, the communal situation got worse in the years following the collapse of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements. So much so that Swarajists (Congressmen like Asaf Ali who were for Council entry) fared poorly in the triennial elections to the Central Legislative Assembly held in 1926 in comparison with their performance in 1923. Many Hindu Swarajists lost to candidates of the Hindu Mahasabha. Nationalist Muslims who stood on the Swarajist ticket lost even more heavily. This was the case not only in the separate Muslim electorates where emphasis on Islamism was at a premium, but in the rare case of Delhi with a joint electorate.

Shankar Lal, Secretary of the Delhi Provincial Congress Committee, wrote on 22nd August 1926 to Sarojini Naidu who was then Congress President: "You know that Delhi is the one place in the whole of India where we have got joint electorates; and during the coming elections the question of having joint electorates all round in future will be put to the test here.

"The Muslim and Hindu votes are in the ratio of one to two, and the Delhi P.C.C. has put up Mr. Asaf Ali, Bar at Law, as their candidate for the Assembly. It has to be admitted that Mr. Asaf Ali's work and his sacrifice during the Non-cooperation have been of a very high order. And if judged impartially the choice of the P.C.C. in this respect cannot be questioned. It is a matter of very great regret, if not of positive shame, that the Hindus of Delhi do not realise the importance and significance of the Delhi elections, and swayed by communal currents are determined upon putting up Hindu candidates on communal tickets... The result is a foregone conclusion: the Muslim candidate fails simply because he is a Muslim. And quite naturally this incident would furnish a very strong illustration, to be quoted in and out of season by all those who swear by separate electorates all round."

As anticipated by Shankar Lal, Asaf Ali lost the election. When the votes were counted on 1st November 1926, the Hindu Mahasabha candidate, advocate Rang Bihari Lal, was declared elected with 1680 votes while Asaf Ali secured

1446 votes. Among those who had campaigned for the Hindu Mahasabha candidate was Swami Shraddhanand, who criticised the Congress Swarajist plank of 'wrecking the Constitution' from within the legislatures.

It is noteworthy that though Asaf Ali lost to a candidate of the Hindu party, he participated in a meeting held in Delhi, at the Arya Samaj Mandir in Chauri Bazar, to pay homage to Swami Dayanand, founder of the Arya Samaj. A movement that aimed at reform of Hindu society by removing caste inequalities, the Arya Samaj had become suspect in the eyes not only of many Muslims but some Hindus because of the Shuddhi or purification ceremony organised by it for those who had 'lost caste' by converting to Islam but felt uncomfortable and wanted to return to the Hindu fold. In the course of his speech at the public meeting, which was presided over by Swami Shraddhanand, Asaf Ali thanked the organisers for inviting him to speak from the platform of a religion other than his own. He praised Swami Dayanand for initiating a sense of liberalism in religion, and said that there was need to promote this trend further. At a time when Hindu society was divided into small and stagnant pools of caste, Dayanand had cut the dividing boundaries so that the stream could flow freely.

Before the year was out, it was Asaf Ali's sad duty to mourn the death of Swami Shraddhanand who was killed by a Muslim fanatic. At a public meeting held on 25th December 1926 at Company Bagh, Asaf Ali said that there was nothing more abhorrent according to Islam than to attack an old and ailing person, specially one who was doing good to others. He expressed his sense of shame that the person who committed the crime happened to be a Muslim. At the height of the enthusiasm and unity generated by the anti- Rowlatt agitation in which Muslims aggrieved on the Khilafat issue joined, Delhi Muslims had done Shaddhanand the honour of carrying him bodily into the Jama Masjid in April 1919 and he addressed the gathering from the pulpit. Jugal Kishore Khanna, a junior contemporary of Asaf Ali and a prominent freedom fighter of Delhi, recalls that Swamiji "started with a Sloka from the Vedas and ended his speech with the Gayatri Mantra"--and there had been no murmur. But Hindu-Muslim rioting broke out when Swamiji's killer Abdul Rashid was executed following conviction, and the Delhi police--manned at various levels mainly by Muslims-- allowed his body to be carried in a procession.

The British authorities had reason to be pleased with the sad end of the Hindu-Muslim unity that prevailed at the beginning of the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements.

An outspoken comment on the Khilafat movement and its sequel was by Annie Besant, who wrote: "It has been one of the many injuries inflicted by the Khilafat crusade that the inner Muslim feeling of hatred against 'unbelievers' has sprung up, naked and unashamed, as in the years gone by...We have been forced to see that the primary allegiance of Mussalmans is to Islamic countries, not to our motherland...How much sympathy with the Moplas is felt by the Muslims outside Malabar has been proved by the defence raised for them by

their fellow believers, and by Mr. Gandhi himself who stated that they had acted as they believed that religion taught them to act. I fear that this is true; but there is no place in a civilised land for people who believe that their religion teaches them to murder, rob, rape, burn...People living in the 20th century must either educate persons who hold these Middle Age views, or else exile them. Their place is in countries sharing their opinions."<sup>5</sup>

While the effect of the Khilafat movement on the Muslim masses was by and large negative, at the level of the leadership there were two distinct trends in the post-Khilafat period. In the case of several notable Khilafatists, the anti-British sentiment stirred by pan-Islamic concern with the fate of Turkey matured into Indian nationalism based on the human right of the people of every country to self-government. Among such were M.A. Ansari, Maulana Azad, Asaf Ali and Syed Mahmud of Bihar. On the other hand, the Ali Brothers took up a narrow communal position and became hostile to the Congress, which they came to regard as a Hindu organisation. Another leading figure of the Khilafat movement, Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman of the United Provinces, took to the Pakistani path at a later stage.

Choudhry Khaliquzzaman had matured from the Islamism of the Khilafat movement to the humane values of political democracy and territorial nationalism which implies solidarity with all of one's neighbours. But when he relapsed into the Islamism of the movement for Pakistan, he became a zealous ideologue of the Muslim League. He envisioned corridors to connect Pakistan with 'Muslim States' such as Hyderabad and Bhopal (with a Hindu majority but ruled by Muslim princes) in what would remain of India after partition. In a letter of 7th October 1942 from Lucknow to M.A. Jinnah, Khaliquzzaman argues against partition of Punjab and Bengal on the basis of Muslim-majority and Hindu-majority areas. He says: "One of the basic principles lying behind the Pakistan idea is that of keeping hostages in Muslim provinces as against the Muslims in the Hindu provinces. If we allow millions of Hindus to go out of our orbit of influence, the security of the Muslims in the minority provinces will greatly be minimised.

"There is one other factor which should be taken into account. If the whole of Punjab becomes a part of Pakistan zone, Kashmere and the other Punjab native estates will have no direct communication left with the non-Muslim provinces. They will naturally desire union with them, and shall be forced to ask the Pakistan Union for a right of transit. In that event the Pakistan Government can fairly claim the same right for Hyderabad and other Muslim estates to establish contact with the Pakistan Union. If the southern and central Punjab is out of Pakistan zone, not only such an opportunity will be lost, but direct communication between Punjab Hindu estates and the Hindu provinces will be established without any such advantage falling to the lot of the Muslim estates in the Hindu-dominated zones." It is noteworthy that Choudhry Khaliquzzaman assumed that the Hindu ruler of the Muslim-majority state of Jammu & Kashmir

would, on the partition of the sub-continent, accede to the Indian Dominion. This even-handedness in the anti-democratic approach of letting rulers decide the future of their subjects suited the Muslim League's communal calculations. The number of Hindu subjects in Muslim-ruled princely States was much greater than of Muslim subjects in Hindu-ruled States. Pakistan would thus hold more 'hostages'.

Neither of the two most prominent exponents of a separate Muslim state in the sub-continent, Mohammad Iqbal and M.A. Jinnah, took part in the Khilafat movement. This was despite the fact that both were already prominent by that time in India's public life. It is therefore wrong to see, as some do, the genesis of Pakistan in the Khilafat movement and in the support extended to it by Gandhiji. Pakistan was the outcome of the poisonous seed of separate electorates sown by the British colonialists a decade earlier at the instance of separatists among the Muslim elite who asked for more-than-equal treatment of their community in relation to other citizens on the ground that India had earlier been under Muslim rule. The Khilafat movement accentuated the sense of a separate Muslim identity, transcending their Indianness, already felt by a large section of Indian Muslims.

## NOTES

1. Some Muslims took exception to the singing of *Bande Mataram* on the ground that it praised goddesses. The Congress did not take the line that the literature and the arts of a country are bound to bear the impress of the religious symbols of the majority of its people. On Gandhiji's advice, the Congress Working Committee decided on 28th October 1937 that only the first two stanzas, which had no religious overtones, should be sung at public gatherings.
2. *India under Morley and Minto* by M.N. Das, Allen and Unwin, 1964.
3. Till the 1930's it was common for Muslims prominent in public life to be members both of the Congress and the Muslim League. Similarly, Hindu leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya were members both of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha.
4. *Histories of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements* by P.C. Bamford, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1925. Reprinted, 1974, Deep Publications.
5. Quoted by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 'Pakistan or the Partition of India', Vol. 8 of *Dr. Balasaheb Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches*, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990.
6. *Pathway to Pakistan* (pp. 426-7) by Choudhury Khaliquzzaman, Longman, Lahore, 1961.

## 6. Harmonious Years

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It was a sound instinct that prompted Asaf Ali to terminate his engagement, contracted in London in 1914, with a granddaughter of the War Minister of the Nizam of Hyderabad. Accustomed to an affluent and aristocratic life style, she could not have fitted into the environment of Asaf Ali's home in the Kucha Chelan quarter of Daryaganj in Delhi. Even less would she have been able to appreciate Asaf Ali's involvement in, let alone herself joining, the national movement with the heavy sacrifices that it demanded.

In waiting till he was fully forty before marrying a person that he found companionable and who reciprocated the feeling, Asaf Ali was unlike most of his contemporaries of the English-educated middle class, whether Hindu or Muslim. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, whose upbringing was more westernised than Asaf Ali's, permitted himself to be pushed into an arranged marriage; there was no domineering father in Asaf Ali's case. M.A. Ansari, who was senior to Asaf Ali in age, got married early to Shamsunnisa, a pious lady who saw no men other than her relatives, except Gandhiji. Ansari's second marriage was with an Englishwoman "whose name and background is obscure. A son was born soon after the marriage, but 'the family never accepted him' or his mother, who lived mostly in Dehradun or Mussoorie. The son – Ahmed Harold – studied medicine in England, and settled in that country." <sup>1</sup>

Maulana Azad, born in the same year (1888) as Asaf Ali, was put through theological education and was married at a very early age to Zuleikha when she was still a child. He has left a poignant account, in his memoirs, of how he received the news of his wife's death while in detention at Ahmadnagar. Also of how, on his first visit to Calcutta after his release, while he was being driven home he asked to be taken first to visit his wife's grave.

Syed Mahmud was a year younger to Asaf Ali, and qualified for the bar in England, and obtained a Ph.D. in Germany. But the women in his home observed purdah, and he did not send his daughters to school. A close friend of the Nehru family, Syed Mahmud was, as Aruna Asaf Ali recalls, in *Private Face*

*of a Public Person*, implored by Kamala Nehru to liberate the women of his family: "If you regard Jawahar as your brother and me as your sister, we expect you to disown purdah."

Among Muslim contemporaries of Asaf Ali prominent in public life, Maulana Hazrat Mohani was unusual in encouraging his wife Nishat-ul-Nisa to participate in political and social activities. He did not believe in purdah.

### **Marriage that Caused a Stir**

Being a Hindu-Muslim marriage, the Aruna-Asaf Ali wedding was a rare instance of a freely chosen relationship, even more striking than Sarojini Chattopadhyaya marrying Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu, a non-Brahmin of South India, outside her caste and linguistic community.

The first meeting of Aruna Gangulee and Asaf Ali was – contrary to popular notions of how love marriages begin – not a chance encounter but a meeting arranged by Aruna's aunt Maya Gangulee, wife of Aruna's uncle Nagendranath Gangulee, an agricultural scientist and a member of the Royal Commission on Indian Agriculture. Nagendranath's first wife was Miradevi, daughter of the poet Rabindranath Tagore; the marriage had failed. Maya (who too had been married earlier to a Banerji of Calcutta) was his second wife. She was at Allahabad on a visit to Purnima, Aruna's younger sister. Purnima was married to Pranab Kumar Banerji, son of Pyarelal Banerji, a leading lawyer of Allahabad.

Aruna had completed at All Saints College in Naini Tal the junior-college level of education, and was also at that time in Allahabad to spend the vacation with her sister. Aruna was passionately interested in English literature, and wanted to go to Oxford or Cambridge for further study. But her father Upendra Nath Gangulee had neither the means nor the inclination to enable her to do so. He was anxious to get her married quickly into a well-to-do family. Aruna was subjected to inspection by prospective grooms and their parents, which infuriated her. One of the young men who interviewed her had entered the I.C.S. and was to become a Cabinet Secretary and Governor of a State in free India. When Aruna Asaf Ali ran into him after his attaining high official status, she remarked jokingly: "Do you remember what a narrow escape you had?" Another candidate belonged to an affluent branch of the Tagore clan, but Aruna told her father that she was not attracted by the indolent wealthy. But her parents were, in those days of early marriage, harried by relatives and friends who wondered what was wrong with Aruna that she still remained a spinster. Aruna planned a course for herself. She would try and become a pupil-teacher at the Gokhale Memorial School for Girls in Calcutta, founded by Mrs. P.K. Roy whose husband, a distinguished scholar, had been a friend and the Calcutta host of the Liberal leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Aruna hoped that the School would assist her to go to England to qualify herself further for teaching English



language and literature.

Maya Gangulee, who sympathised with her niece's predicament, proposed a way out. It was not necessary for Aruna to go to Oxford or Cambridge for improving her knowledge of English literature. Maya suggested that she might meet Asaf Ali, already prominent as a barrister and in public life. He was single, and well versed not only in English literature but history, philosophy, and political economy.

An old friend of Asaf's, Maya wrote also to the eligible bachelor, who was getting no younger, inviting him to visit Allahabad during her stay there as a house guest of Pyarelal Banerji. She said that she would like him to meet there a young friend of hers.

Accordingly, Asaf Ali broke journey at Allahabad early in January 1928 on his way back to Delhi from Calcutta after attending the Muslim League's annual session at the close of December 1927. The Congress and the Muslim League had not yet become inimical, and it was still common for leaders of the two organisations to be present as visitors at each other's annual sessions. Asaf Ali had participated in the Madras session of the Congress earlier in December 1927 before going to Calcutta. Among the distinguished visitors at the Calcutta session of the League were Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu and Nalini Ranjan Sarkar.

When Aruna and Asaf Ali met at Pyarelal Banerji's house in Allahabad, the two were immediately attracted to each other. Asaf Ali had intended to resume his journey to Delhi the same day, but after meeting and talking to Aruna he readily accepted Maya Gangulee's suggestion that he stay back and leave the next day if he had to. In the morning, as Aruna and Asaf paced round the lawn, and explored each other's minds, he proposed marriage. Aruna was at once pleased and perturbed. She suggested that they remain in touch through correspondence, and meanwhile she would seek her father's consent.

Consent Upendra Nath Gangulee would not. The objections to the proposal, as perceived by him, were formidable. There was a great disparity – 21 years – in age. Secondly, a Hindu-Muslim marriage was a fantastic and perilous project in those days of communal tension. Thirdly, Asaf Ali was by no means affluent. He had sold off his interest in the ancestral zamindari village in U.P. when he gave up legal practice during the Non-cooperation movement.

When Upendra Nath died in March 1928, Asaf Ali went to Naini Tal on a condolence visit. This meeting strengthened the mutual attraction felt by Aruna and Asaf, but marriage had necessarily to be deferred. Correspondence between the two continued. Asaf Ali's letters were at once affectionate and educative. He would respond to Aruna's eager and curious questions on a variety of subjects. In the process he conveyed his own philosophy of life, which Aruna found agreeable. She made the decision to marry. In September 1928 Asaf Ali went again to Naini Tal, where a Muslim form of marriage was gone through, she being named 'Kulsum Zamani' for the occasion. Asaf Ali sub-

sequently got the marriage registered in Delhi under civil law.

The marriage touched off a storm of protest from various quarters. Proclaiming himself the guardian of Aruna following Upendra Nath's death, Nagendra Nath Gangulee shot off a telegram to the District Magistrate of Naini Tal stating that Aruna was a minor and that she did not have his consent to marry Asaf Ali. Their marriage, he said, would therefore be invalid. In any case, Nagendra Nath made it known to his relatives and friends that Aruna was dead so far as he was concerned, and he had performed her *shraddh*. It is a different matter that, some years later when he met Asaf Ali in Delhi, at Aruna's instance, he was fascinated by the charming barrister and the two became good friends.

On the side of Asaf Ali's family, too, the reactions to his maverick action were adverse. His mother was shocked both because the marriage was outside the community and because Asaf Ali had ignored proposals of marriage from Muslim families of rank.

Outside the familial network, reactions in political circles were also, with notable exceptions, hostile. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya would turn his face away from Aruna when the two were thrown together at Congress gatherings, because – though he was a social reformer who promoted women's education – he could not endure the thought of a Bengali Brahmin girl marrying a Muslim. Jugal Kishore Khanna recalls that when Asaf Ali was the Congress candidate from Delhi during the 1934 elections to the Central Legislative Assembly, in which he won against Rai Bahadur Nahak Chand, some communalists, both Hindu and Muslim, held it against Asaf Ali that he had married a Hindu.

Tallest among those in public life who later blessed the unorthodox marriage was Gandhiji. He did not believe in inter-communal marriage as a means of bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity; rather, he thought that such marriages might follow unity. Nevertheless he was happy about the marriage. Aruna Asaf Ali recalls: "Gandhiji's blessing of what was at that time a shockingly unconventional marriage was in contrast to the disapproval it evoked among many...He spoke of it as a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. I protested that I had married Asaf not because he was a Muslim but because of the affinity we felt, with our shared interest in English literature and the impression he made on me with his knowledge of history and philosophy, his agreeable personality and refined manners. But Gandhiji insisted that our marriage had symbolic significance."

Aruna, who had just crossed nineteen in July 1928, felt amused and flattered when some of Asaf Ali's friends, who were close enough to take the liberty, twitted him with 'cradle-snatching'.

Very soon after her marriage Aruna was inducted into the work of the Delhi Women's League by Rameshwari Nehru who was its founder and president. The work would keep Aruna occupied during the day – and away from the somewhat stifling social atmosphere of Kucha Chelan – while Asaf Ali went to the courts, or to attend meetings of the Delhi Municipal Committee.

## **An Eclectic Circle of Friends**

Among Asaf Ali's older friends was C. Rajagopalachari – one with whom Asaf Ali was of like mind in preferring orderly and parliamentary methods for winning self-government. Aruna Asaf Ali recalls that on a visit by Rajaji to their Kucha Chelan home, he noticed the figurine of a deity in a niche in Aruna's room. He advised her to light a lamp every evening in the alcove: it would be auspicious and soothing. Little did Aruna know then that among numerous further meetings, she was to have a momentous encounter with Rajaji during the turbulent years of the Quit India movement. He was flown to Delhi by Biju Patnaik in a Dalmia Airways aircraft for a discussion with Aruna and her underground colleagues. Rajaji wanted to understand their viewpoint, and to persuade them to his own. This meeting is comparable in its drama and significance to Gandhiji's meeting and discussion with Aruna Asaf Ali at Poona, while she was underground, and his sustained correspondence with her even though he was against secrecy and violence.

A frequent house guest used to be Maulana Azad. Aruna Asaf Ali recalls: "Often during the fateful and eventful years of 1930 to 1941 the Congress Working Committee would be compelled to hold its meetings in the months of May and June. Maulana Saheb was sensitive to the fierce heat of Delhi. He suffered more than others, and anxious to spare him the discomforts inevitable in the stifling atmosphere of our home in Kucha Chelan, on one occasion I suggested to my husband that Maulana Saheb should be persuaded to stay at the Birla House where some of his other colleagues generally stayed. Asaf Saheb was not quite sure if it was proper on our part to suggest this, but nevertheless he agreed. Birla House was also informed that Maulana Saheb would be staying there.

"On my part I was sure that the Maulana would welcome the suggestion as the unbearable heat would have affected his health. But I was wrong. Maulana Saheb brushed aside the suggestion in his own characteristic way. When he arrived he entered our car and, much to my embarrassment, asked to be driven to Kucha Chelan! We were overwhelmed, but I think I am not exaggerating if I say that the meaning of personal values acquired a new significance for me that day." <sup>2</sup>

An old and deeply valued friend of Asaf Ali's was Hosain Alikhan of Hyderabad, educator and man of letters. The quality of their relationship is illustrated by the following extracts from Asaf Ali's letters to Hosain Alikhan – which this writer owes to Hosain's son (and Asaf Ali's godson) Asaf Alikhan. In May 1914, Asaf Ali writes from London to Hosain Alikhan who was at Oxford: "Get a copy of 'Love-songs and Elegies' by Manmohan Ghose, published by Elkin Mathews. You pay one shilling for it, but by all that I consider poetic it can have its worth in pearls and sapphire...There is a flame of extraordinary effulgence which burns in the lamp of his soul. His lyrics have an intoxicating sap in them, and his elegies powerful currents of tears. And yet

there is a silence, a soul penetrating silence, in his poems. Read him carefully – especially ‘The Orchard’ and ‘The Exile’...But there is so little of him that we cannot be justified in undertaking the difficult task of comparison. He will be the Indian (Francis) Thompson if he perseveres.”

In November 1917, on Hosain Alikhan returning home from England, Asaf Ali writes to him: “I am longing to meet you. Why do you not run up for a few days? I have been rather busy lately, for after two-and-a-half years, I have plunged into politics with a vengeance.” About Aruna, Asaf Ali says in the course of a letter of 21st June 1928: “My fiancée and I are more of pals than prospective man and wife.” And on 18th January 1929: “I have been a married man for five months! So all my soarings have finally landed me on a peak which overlooks Parnassus. My wife is a jewel...”

A companion soul of Asaf Ali’s in matters literary and philosophical in Delhi was Khwaja Hasan Nizami (1877-1955), the then hereditary head of the shrine of Nizamuddin Aulia. Hasan Nizami has left two charming pen portraits of Asaf Ali and Aruna, reproduced by his son Hasan Nizami Sani in the course of an article in Urdu on ‘Syed Asaf Ali Dehlavi and Khwaja Hasan Nizami’. As translated by Gyan Singh, the cameo of Asaf Ali reads:

“Medium height, delicate frame, expressive eyes, salty complexion, young in age, clean-shaven, sensitivity and sweetness in voice.

“One of Delhi’s gentry of distinguished lineage. Leader. Equally popular amongst Hindus and Muslims. Helps all.

“There is magic in his speech and enchantment in his writing. When he speaks the muscles in his face move like musical membranes, and what he has in mind comes out like a fine couplet. The handwriting of the English-educated is generally not good but his is beautiful. A very good poet. Very good politician. Very good speaker.

“Asaf by name. Solomon by temperament. Akbar by determination. Shah Jahan by heart. Aurangzeb by adamant resolve. Angels might have moulded him in plaster of Paris and then coloured it with the soil of Delhi and Lucknow: he appears so elegant and sensitive. Has been to prison many times and his name will appear in many chapters of the future history of India.”

Hasan Nizami Sani then reproduces his father’s pen portrait of Begum Aruna Asaf Ali with the words: ‘Now see how the lens of Khwaja Sahib’s camera opens and its eye becomes the tip of his pen’:

“Medium height, flower-like body, pretty face, fair complexion, nationality--Hindu, religion--deference to husband, service of country and compassion for women.

“To me she looks like a statue shaped by some Italian master, but when she talks she is like a speaking idol of Sita Devi from a choice collection of icons made by Indian sculptors.

“Obstinacy of a woman, narcissism of a woman, mental brittleness of a woman – all these are miles away from her. She is thus a man in the body of a

woman, but without the selfishness, lack of loyalty, quick temper and domineering nature associated with a man.

"There is masculine firmness in her speech from the platform. Speaks with the fearlessness of the pure. When she addresses one, she becomes a Mohini with all the gentleness of Indian culture.

"Has been to prison a number of times. Good daughter of her parents. Good wife of the husband. Caring daughter-in-law. When God gives her a child, one does not know what kind of a mother she would be."

Hasan Nizami Sani adds: "Khwaja Sahib drew this pen picture of Begum Aruna Asaf Ali before 1942. If he had written this after her heroic role in the Quit India movement, then perhaps Khwaja Sahib might have said that God has kept her free of the responsibilities of motherhood so that she could take part in the freedom struggle without domestic cares and the entire nation might fill her lap."

Hasan Nizami Sani recounts in the course of his article the circumstances in which his father and Asaf Ali came to know each other, and the common interests which bound them.

"The link between Khwaja Sahib and Asaf Sahib was Mulla Wahidi Dehlavi. He was Asaf Sahib's class-fellow and friend, and lived in the same mohalla. And Khwaja Sahib's relationship with Wahidi Sahib was like one life in two bodies.

"Young Asaf and Wahidi both studied in the same *madrassa*—later known as Anglo-Arabic School (now Dr. Zakir Husain College), outside Ajmeri Gate. Both had lost their fathers, and had for guardians their self-sacrificing mothers. Such children are generally very good in studies. Young Asaf showed this characteristic in the examinations, but Wahidi failed and became despondent. It was during those days that he met Khwaja Hasan Nizami, who encouraged him and told him not to be disheartened by failure in examinations, because it was after all the master horse-riders who fall in the battlefield.

"Asaf Ali went to England and lost touch with his friend's mentor. But when he came back he saw Khwaja Sahib often visiting his friend Wahidi's house in the neighbourhood, and began to meet him. Asaf Sahib soon developed interest in Sufism and Vedanta. Khwaja Sahib was fond of Asaf Ali because, despite his western education and preoccupation with politics, he had retained his oriental outlook and had an abiding love for Urdu literature and Delhi. Khwaja Sahib's diaries are full of references to Asaf Sahib and Begum Aruna Asaf Ali. Gandhians may not approve of Begum Asaf Ali having stepped out of the boundaries of Gandhian methods, but Khwaja Sahib had liked it because he held it to be in accordance with Islamic teaching.

"Sufi Khwaja Hasan Nizami also liked Asaf Sahib for moving towards egalitarianism and bringing others towards it, in spite of his feudal background. The distinction between the ruler and the ruled, high and low, had prevailed for thousands of years and could not be erased easily. I recollect an occasion when

Asaf Sahib as Governor of Orissa came to Delhi and was to visit Khwaja Sahib. As per regulations, the police and security people came before his arrival. At that time some common people of Delhi were seated round Khwaja Sahib. When they learnt that a Governor was to come, they requested to be allowed to see him as they had never seen a Governor before. The police did not like these strangers to be present, but Khwaja Sahib said that it was the home of a fakir where all were equally welcome. Then the Governor came. As soon as he entered, the simple folks said loudly to the police: 'This is amazing. You were saying that a Governor was coming, but this is our own Asaf Sahib Kucha Chelanwala!' Asaf Sahib and Khwaja Sahib had a good laugh."

Among close friends and followers of Asaf Ali in Delhi during the freedom struggle, belonging to a younger generation, were Deshbandhu Gupta and Jugal Kishore Khanna. Aruna recalls that Deshbandhu regarded her husband as an elder brother, and her as his *bhabhi* who could always count on his assistance. Deshbandhu died prematurely, in an air crash near Calcutta airport on the morning of 21st November 1951. Then president of the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference, he was on his way from Delhi for a meeting of the A.I.N.E.C.'s standing committee.

The interview with Jugal Kishore Khanna conducted by Hari Dev Sharma of the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, as part of the institution's Oral History project, is a valuable source of information on the freedom movement in Delhi and Asaf Ali's part in it. Among his recollections is the message he sent from Delhi through Asaf Ali to the Congress Working Committee members who were meeting at Bombay in August 1942, alerting them about the British authorities' plan to arrest them.

Another of Asaf Ali's friends in Delhi was Brijlal Nehru (a nephew of Motilal Nehru), and his wife Rameshwari. Aruna Asaf Ali recalls how at their residence on Clive Road (now Tyagaraja Marg) she first met Jawaharlal Nehru and his father in the winter of 1928: "Though my husband was of the same age as Jawaharlal, he was equally well acquainted with Motilal Nehru. Asaf was a practising lawyer, unlike Jawaharlal who never developed a serious interest in the profession in which his father had attained high fame and wealth. Asaf often met Motilal Nehru, whom he esteemed as a towering senior both in public life and in the legal profession. This was the background to the Establishment Nehru of Delhi inviting us to meet his seditious clansmen from Allahabad." (*Fragments from the Past*, p.423).

A family friend closer to Aruna's age was Shaista Ikramullah. She has summed up her impressions of the Asaf Alis with admirable felicity of expression in the course of her autobiography: "Mr. Asaf Ali was not only one of the most prominent figures of the Indian national movement but one of the most charming also. He belonged to Delhi, not only in the sense that he came from one of its oldest families, but because he was the quintessence of its culture. He

had the courtesy and the charm, the grace, the elegance and the manner, that undefinable air of breeding which only those nurtured in the best tradition of our culture possess. I have never heard and never shall hear again Urdu spoken as Asaf Ali spoke it. It makes me sad to think that my children have not even heard the full range of its musical cadence. I was indeed fortunate to have heard it, fortunate to have known persons of such rare quality as Asaf Ali and his young wife, Aruna.

"*Bhabhi*, as we called Mrs. Asaf Ali, gave me my first taste of social service. She got me to become a member of the Delhi Women's League. I did not do anything very much, except attend various lectures given by well-known visitors. The most interesting among them and the one I remember the most clearly was by the famous Turkish writer, speaker and politician, Khalida Adeb Khanam. It seems strange, when I look back on it all, to think that I, who eventually became such an ardent Muslim Leaguer, should have begun my apprenticeship under Aruna Asaf Ali. Little did she suspect the lines on which I would develop later. Little did I know myself.

"When I met Aruna, even then she had a burning transparent sincerity and I have not been surprised at her subsequent revolutionary career. But I know that she is not the hard-headed revolutionary people imagine her to be, but a woman with great sweetness and gentleness of character, capable of tender and deep affection. That is how she was when I met her and that woman, I know, is still there."<sup>3</sup>

## **In Delhi Municipality**

When Asaf Ali stood for election to the Delhi Municipal Committee in 1923, and won, it was in the tradition of Congressmen combining constructive work in the civic field with the political struggle for national freedom.

A pioneer of local self-government was Sir Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915), who was present at the foundation meeting of the Indian National Congress in Bombay in 1885 and was one of its early presidents. He became chairman of the Bombay Corporation while quite young, and is gratefully remembered for making it a self-governing city and giving of his best over a period of forty years for its improvement. It was also in Bombay province that Vithalbhai Patel (1873-1933), elder brother of Sardar Patel, secured the passage by the provincial Legislative Council of the Primary Education Bill which empowered municipalities to introduce free and compulsory primary education in their respective areas. As a member of the Bandra municipality, Vithalbhai was responsible for introducing compulsory primary education in that suburb. Later, as president of the Bombay municipal corporation, he promoted the teaching of Hindi, introduced Swadeshi in all departments of the Corporation, and gave special encouragement to the education of children from the depressed

sections of society now known as the scheduled castes.

In the South, C. Rajagopalachari (1878-1972) first acquired administrative experience as chairman of the Salem municipality. In this capacity he did much to fight the evil of untouchability, apart from promoting improvement in the civic services.

Jawaharlal Nehru served for two years during 1923-25 as chairman of Allahabad Municipality, though chafing against the restrictions under which it had to function. He recalls in the *Autobiography* how he tried to rectify the injustice in his home town, as in other Indian cities, of collecting the greater part of revenue from the congested old areas but spending more on the spruce maintenance of the new areas where "all the Big Noises and Little Noises live".

When Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das became mayor of Calcutta in March 1924, Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1945) who had turned his back on the Indian Civil Service, was appointed as the Corporation's Chief Executive Officer at the early age of 27. He took only half of the salary attached to the post, and revolutionised the relations between the Corporation and the public of Calcutta. The British interests in the city suddenly found themselves deprived of their importance, while the people began to feel for the first time that municipal officers and employees were public servants and not bureaucrats with no accountability. The arrest of Subhas Bose in October 1924, ostensibly to scotch a revolutionary conspiracy, was widely seen as a calculated blow at the Swarajist administration of the Corporation.

In Delhi, the forum of the Municipal Committee was specially important because Delhi was not a province and had no provincial legislature. The Municipal Committee was burdened with an official at its head: the Committee could not elect its own chairman. Asaf Ali and other Congressmen utilised to the utmost the limited elbow room that was available.

On 22nd October 1929, the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi, Thompson, addressed a letter to the Home Secretary to the Government of India, Emerson, stating that Gandhiji was due to visit Delhi in November and it was possible that, "due to excitement", the Municipality might decide to hoist the national flag (as the Congress flag was known those days). Thompson sought the Government's instructions. The Home Secretary said in reply that the Deputy Commissioner should do all in his power to dissuade the Municipal Committee from passing a resolution that the Swaraj Flag be flown over the municipal building. There were already standing instructions from the Home Department, dating from August 1922, to local Governments not to permit the hoisting of the national flag on municipal and Government buildings.

Asaf Ali, deeply attached to his home city of Delhi, offered Satyagraha and courted arrest in order to save from destruction – as part of an official project for 'city improvement' – a part of the old city wall enclosing Daryaganj. It was in grateful remembrance of this that the stretch of the road leading from Ajmere Gate to Delhi Gate was named after Asaf Ali after independence. Lala



Sham Nath, a younger contemporary of Asaf Ali, was at that time Mayor of Delhi. A statue of Asaf Ali was also installed at the approach to Delhi Gate from New Delhi.

Asaf Ali was proud of Delhi's unique culture, and was of the view that the city and the neighbouring parts of the then Punjab and the United Provinces should be constituted into a political unit. It was at his instance that the Delhi Provincial Congress Committee (whose jurisdiction extended well beyond the city to cover parts of the U.P. including Meerut and Muzaffarnagar, and of the present Rajasthan) adopted a resolution on the subject. It demanded that Delhi should no longer be a Chief Commissioner's province directly administered by the British Government of India but should be turned into a Chief Commissioner's province with an elected Assembly and popular government as in the other provinces. After independence Delhi did become a part 'C' State and remained so for some years. But the experiment was discontinued on the ground that two elected governments – Central and State – could not function in the same territory. Delhi secured instead a Municipal Corporation and subsequently a Metropolitan Council.

Aruna and Asaf Ali would attend together the annual sessions and other meetings of the Congress. Both participated in the Salt Satyagraha which Gandhiji inaugurated in March 1930. They were held in separate prisons for men and for women at Lahore, jail accommodation being insufficient at that time in Delhi. It was in the Lahore prison, during 1930-31, that Asaf Ali wrote six short stories in English and sent them to Aruna in 'letters from one prison to another'. He got them printed subsequently as part of 'Gossamer and Twilight'.

### **A Swarajist Speaks**

Though Asaf Ali, as a loyal soldier, joined every Satyagraha campaign launched by Gandhiji, his forte was espousal of the national cause from the public platform and its immensely more effective extension, the floor of an elected assembly. During 1933-34, Asaf Ali advocated Council entry in the course of correspondence with Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru as well as through the columns of the Press.

Following is an 'open letter' which Asaf Ali addressed to Gandhiji on 22nd June 1933 and simultaneously released to the Press:

Dear Mahatmaji,

I have purposely abstained from writing to you so far out of consideration for your health, but the friends and colleagues I have consulted have pressed me not to delay any longer. Both they and I feel that it is imperative in the interests of the country that you should know how a section of Congressmen feel.

During the last 14 years of the experimental movement of which you are

the author, I have in my humble way been associated with it from the day you first propounded its principles in November 1919 at the first Khilafat Conference held at Delhi. In fact, I was one of the fifteen men who were the first to listen to your exposition of Satyagraha at Principal Rudra's house early in 1919, and agreed to sign the Satyagraha pledge.

I may have felt critical, but my sense of discipline has prevailed and I have not failed to obey. The little part I have played in the movement may not entitle me to claim a hearing as a matter of right, but I suppose as one who has observed things from inside I may be permitted to say what I feel and what, I am assured, many others feel also.

The non-violent non-cooperation movement of which the civil disobedience and no-rent campaigns are corollaries, was launched by you as an experiment which had never been tried on such a scale in history, although one in which your faith was and is firm as a rock. In fact, the ideal on which this movement is based is the surest solvent of the ills with which this world is afflicted. The drift of centuries of thought is behind your faith and conviction, and we must respect it.

But some of us, who have humbly striven hard to give our best to your experiment, feel that the time has come to take stock of things. The ideal of a rediscovered creed which you have set up, and which Mahavira, Buddha and Christ preached, has proved as much an ideal today as it was in their days.

The immediate political problem, stated briefly, is that out of 350 millions, one-third are in the Indian States on whom we should not count. Out of the remaining two-thirds, nearly five millions are Government servants. They have dependants and thus a body of some 50 millions are personally interested in the Government machinery. To them we may add Indian rulers, landholders, capitalists, and those who are bound to the present system by ties of loyalty rewarded by honours.

Again, I am doubtful of Muslims in their present mood, which means another 60 or 65 millions put out of action. This would leave us barely one hundred millions who may be taken to be wanting a political change even at some cost. Of these only an insignificant percentage has participated in the movement, while others have been passive sympathisers. Your non-programme has had a run of 14 years off and on, Fatigue and stagnation and the wave of a

which can inspire people with  
may return to your method,  
if the ballot box succeeds there

Finally, the question arises: "What are we to do?" And my unequivocal answer is: "Act with the courage of fighters, who know when to call a halt." The Germans fought the whole world practically, but a day came and they said, "No further." Had we done so a year ago when I had the temerity to suggest a *via media* to Malaviyaji and others at the first meeting under Dr. Kitchlew's chairmanship in June 1932, and had we negotiated through the Liberals, then the issue would have been different today. I told Malaviyaji that some reasonable compromise appeared to me possible at the time. Today, we are at the low watermark. The conditions that you lay down for the campaign – 'quality and not quantity', and 'no secrecy' (and I know you do not say one thing and mean another) – negative any chance of a swell that may force conclusions.

We can (instead) make it clear that we mean to take the fullest advantage of the constitutional machinery for advancing our aims and objects, i.e., acquiring the fullest control of the Government. We can have a five year plan of action within the law to test the possibilities of the constitutional machinery for enlarging our rights. We can go as far as we can to utilise the machinery, and emphatically rebut the accusation of 'negation'.

If our five year plan fails, it will be open to the people to embark on whatever method appeals to them at the time for achieving their object. We should make it plain that in our opinion the 'safeguards' are the negation of responsibility, and make for disastrous friction; and if our unconditional cooperation is required they (the safeguards) should go and the Constitution should be made elastic to admit of automatic expansion without further reference to the British Parliament. If the desired amendment is carried out in the right spirit, we should work the Constitution with a will; otherwise a fighting programme of work from within, coupled with such other auxiliary work from without as may be called for, may be adopted.

In any case I am definitely of opinion that there is far more constructive work for the Congress to do than the revival of civil disobedience (merely) to maintain a principle.

Our forces which are intact want a change of strategy and a new enthusiasm for a new objective. The Ballot Box front is the nearest objective, and all can join in the game. If our morale and discipline are what I believe they are, the capture of the citadel is not beyond possibility. It is merely a question of change of strategy and tactics. The fact is that we want the control of the levers; and for that, the direct route is indicated. I am aware of the argument that the laying bare of such a plan will provide the opponents with a pretext for insisting on 'safeguards' and the strengthening of barriers. I regard this as a weak argument. If the British are

insincere, the checks and barriers will be there in any case, but our declaration of a clear offer of cooperation for five years, as a test, will shift the onus to their shoulders. And any disappointments which follow will not be traceable to any mental reservations on our part. The great mass of people and the world will judge us all.

I beg to remain,  
with respect,  
your sincerely,  
ASAF ALI

To this, Gandhiji who was convalescing at Poona sent the following reply on 26th June 1933: "I have your long letter for which I thank you. I do not at all mind your having sent it to the Press. You had a perfect right to send me that letter and I appreciate the frankness with which you have expressed your views.

"I am, as yet, unable to say anything on the present situation because I am still bed-ridden and have not been able to make an analytical study of it. I want you, however, to understand my fundamental difficulty which constitutes also my limitation. Non-violence for me is not a mere experiment. It is part of my life and the whole of the creed of Satyagraha, Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience and the like are necessary deductions from the fundamental proposition that non-violence is the law of life for human beings. For me it is both a means and the end, and I am more than ever convinced that in the complex situation that faces India, there is no other way of gaining real freedom. In applying my mind to the present situation I must, therefore, test everything in terms of non-violence."

There was also an exchange of thoughtful letters between Asaf Ali and Jawaharlal Nehru on the political situation towards the close of 1933 when the civil disobedience movement had waned, the British Government had given its Communal Award, and elections to the provincial assemblies on an expanded franchise were expected to be held within a few years. The two agree in placing a low valuation, from the viewpoint of political mobilisation, on the Gandhian constructive programme. The alternative that Asaf Ali urges is a strengthening of the Congress organisation through a large network of cadres who would work on a living wage. This would enable the Congress to win an impressive victory in the elections so as to demonstrate its strength as well as to create a crisis for the British regime from within the legislatures. Jawaharlal Nehru does not respond favourably to the idea of building up a cadre-based party, fearing that many difficulties would be placed in the way; he is for continuing direct action, even if on a low key.

Following are extracts from Asaf Ali's letter of 30th September 1933 from Delhi:

My dear Jawaharlal,

I wrote you a letter immediately after your return to Allahabad, welcoming you to liberty--such as it is--but on my return to Delhi yesterday after an

absence of some weeks, I found it still lying on my table owing to my clerk's remissness. However, although this welcome is belated it is none the less sincere...

Mahatmaji's greatness is indisputable: but his appeal appears to have undergone some shrinkage. Many look up to you to fill the role which is reserved for a practical politician (I am using this term in its best sense) who may deal with the immediate future...

The real question is whether some organisation which may retain the entire Congress programme – minus civil disobedience – is necessary or not. The revival of the Swaraj Party – sooner or later – is almost certain. And I fear the revival of the pro- and no- changer controversy cannot but weaken the national forces. The real question is the evolution of an immediate programme of work. Unity, removal of untouchability and Khaddar are all right. But if I am not mistaken, there is no go in them. You will find it difficult to evoke any dynamic enthusiasm for these. I think it was Mazzini who said, 'No battle cry can create two successive revolutions', or words to that effect.

Unity – and I say this after full consideration, and experience of the last Unity Conference – which neither pacts nor appeals can bring about, will be possible only on an economic basis. But experience alone will bring it about. The socialistic ideology has great potentialities, and if properly set out must catch the people's imagination. We require an organisation, a functioning and living body of men to propagate the ideas in a systematic way. Fabianism may suffice for intellectuals, but to penetrate the substrata of future constituencies you must have one lakh, at least, of trained, devoted and discreet workers and teachers who should go and live in villages, each in charge of five villages, and patiently work as teachers, and medical men, and give their constituents the new ideas in doses easily digestible. This is for the rural population only. And it means a network of well-organised, trained men whose living wage should be guaranteed. Similarly you must have urban workers. Enthusiasts, who undertake to work honorarily, may do much, but it is like offering hostages to chance. The Congress has an incomparable prestige: but the work you have in view requires a functioning organisation and not merely the prestige of a name. Haphazard spurts of civil disobedience may familiarise people with certain methods of direct action – but direct action without a well-knit organisation is bound to bring disappointment in its train. There is no question about fundamentals; but the methods of work have to be considered.

Quite about three crores and a half are going to have votes, and they will be ready to exercise their electoral rights in favour of or against someone. The legislatures thus filled out will act in the name of one-fifth of the adult population of India. Some two thousand and more men and women shall have to be found to do the work in the legislatures. If the Congress keeps

out of the show and prefers to remain an opposition outside the legislatures, the opportunities of tinkering in the provinces will be utilised to delay the precipitation of a real political crisis and the great day, which we all hope for, may recede further away. But with the Congress in office or in opposition in different provinces – e.g. in the United Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, Bombay, Central Provinces and North-west Frontier Province in office, and possibly also in Madras; and in Assam, Bengal, the Punjab and Sind in opposition--much may be achieved. And if a coalition is made possible – which is not impossible – in the Central legislature, some effective work may be done there too. In any case, a crisis of incalculable value can be precipitated. The contact with reality will be closer, besides strengthening our organisation.

These are some of the questions which many of us trying to settle in our minds. If you could throw light on them either by private correspondence or through a public statement, it would be helpful.

I hope you will excuse this long letter, which has exceeded the bounds of a merely friendly welcome. I do hope your dear mother is better now. May we congratulate Krishna on the news that has appeared in today's papers. My wife wishes to be remembered to you.

Yours ever sincerely,

ASAF ALI

Jawaharlal Nehru replied on 12th October 1933 from Anand Bhawan, Allahabad: "My dear Asaf Ali, I have your letter. You will forgive me if I send you a brief reply as my mother's illness and various other matters are filling up my time. Any real reply to your letter would develop into a long essay...

"Personally I think that a withdrawal of civil disobedience would be a blunder of the first magnitude. Having regard both to the Indian situation and the international situation I feel that our direct action struggle must be carried on even though at low level. From the point of view of the struggle I do not attach importance to what are called the constructive activities of the Congress. I am, therefore, not interested at present in any such activities, or rather it would be more correct to say that I am not prepared to give any time or energy to them.

"I am not at all enamoured of Harijan work though of course I am very keen on the abolition of untouchability. I realise that there is some feeling among the Mussalmans that the Harijan movement is aimed at strengthening the Hindus politically. This is of course without foundation but none the less it is there. As a matter of fact the aspect of the Harijan movement which appeals to me most is that it will weaken the Hindus in the sense that it will create a split amongst them. I like such splits because they clear up the position and bring real issues before the public. It is a good thing that the orthodox section of the Hindus is showing its true colours and behaving politically as a most reactionary group...

"I do not see how the question of Council entry arises now. According to

the most optimistic estimates any new Council will not begin functioning for three or four years. Practical politicians do not lay down their immediate programme for a contingency which may occur three years later or may not occur at all.

"I do not think it is possible for us now, or even if civil disobedience is withdrawn, to organise the peasantry and others properly. All manner of obstructions are being and will be put in the way of such real work. It seems to me almost easier to do some organisational work in the rural areas through civil disobedience than otherwise."

Shortly before Asaf Ali wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru, V.S. Srivinas Sastri made a similar suggestion to Gandhiji. In the course of his letter to his 'dearest brother', written from Coimbatore on 27th August 1933, Sastri refers to the ebbing away of the fervour which marked the launching of the civil disobedience movement in March 1930, and says: "Another answer is taking shape in people's minds. It is that civil disobedience, both mass and individual, must be given up. A new policy, aiming at national good in legislation, finance and administration all round has long been overdue and must be tried, over and above what is now called the constructive programme of the Congress. I believe this feeling is common outside the Congress, and is gaining ground inside Congress..."

"Unfortunately no man, however big, can be always trusted to know his limitations and make room when the cause to which he is devoted requires it... The moment is come – in my opinion it came long ago – for you to say, 'I set Congress free to try other methods. I have plenty of God's work to do, for the nation's welfare, with Harijans'."

In July 1934, Gandhiji issued a statement calling off the mass civil disobedience movement and confining civil disobedience to himself alone. Welcoming the revival of the Swaraj Party for fighting the forthcoming elections, he commended the dual policy of struggle both within and outside legislatures. Since the statement had been interpreted variously, Gandhiji discussed it threadbare at a meeting some weeks later at Ranchi. Present were, among others, C. Rajagopalachari, M.A. Ansari, Asaf Ali, Rajendra Prasad and Sarojini Naidu.

Asaf Ali is quoted by Tendulkar<sup>4</sup> as saying to Gandhiji in the course of the discussion: "I have understood your statement to mean that you have relieved the Congressmen; and since you say that civil disobedience should be according to your conception, you have confined it to yourself...Civil disobedience must remain in our armoury. But the present is not the time to use it, nor does it seem likely to come in the immediate future. You should therefore, not use that weapon now."

Gandhiji remarked, at a later stage during the discussion, that he had found a large body of men "looking to the Councils...I goaded Dr. Bidhan Roy. I said: 'I advise you to form a party.' I gave similar advice to Asaf Ali, Satyamurti and

Abhyankar... You don't believe in individual civil disobedience. When mass action comes, you will of course be there."

A logical sequel to the termination of mass civil disobedience was the formation of a Congress Parliamentary Board in connection with the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly that were due in 1934. Asaf Ali was appointed as a member and secretary of the Board.

The *Bombay Chronicle* carried on 7th August 1934 an article by Asaf Ali under the headline: "Struggle for freedom: Why legislatures must be captured". He discusses the three ways of bringing about a fundamental change in the system and policies of government:

One is a successful violent revolution, which presumes the support and participation of the army, and communication and transport services, which we cannot boast of.

The second is a successful peaceful revolution. The legislatures are there and men will be forthcoming to seek election to them. They will woo constituencies, and go in and pose as elected representatives of the people. If it were possible for the country to refuse to send any representatives to the legislatures as a protest against the present or the proposed constitution, it would be an ocular demonstration of the country's will to the world. But unfortunately there is no possibility of such an expression of the country's will. The world can be deceived into the belief that those standing out of the legislatures are only disgruntled agitators who may have a following but cannot face elections.

The third and right course is to take a positive attitude. In a political struggle it is a mistake to insist exclusively on the negative side. If certain contingencies require emphasis on the negative, the statesmanlike method is to combine it with parliamentary action. For national reconstruction, we have to put our hands on the plough now if the soil to be tilled is to bear a harvest in time: abolition of illiteracy, of unemployment, of death-dealing and health-sapping insanitary conditions, and the promotion of national industries.

In the course of an article in the *Pioneer*, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai poured well deserved ridicule on the equivocal stand taken by the Congress Working Committee on the Communal Award announced by Ramsay MacDonald, the British Prime Minister, on 4th August 1932. The Award, which was incorporated in a White Paper on constitutional 'reforms' for India, continued separate electorates for Muslims and conferred on them a third of the elective seats in the Central Legislative Assembly though they formed only a quarter of the population of British India. Muslims were to have a disproportionately large representation in the legislatures of provinces where they were in a minority. In Bengal and Punjab where Muslims formed a bare majority of the population, the seats reserved for them fell short of one-half; but in alliance with European members and representatives of propertied interests, Muslims could head the



Ministry in these provinces (as they actually did when the Government of India Act of 1935, which granted provincial autonomy, came into force)

Rafi Ahmed Kidwai said in his article that the Congress Working Committee's resolution "tells the Muslims: 'We are not rejecting the Communal Award. And in return we invite you to join us in rejecting the White Paper.' It tells the Hindus: 'It is true we are not rejecting the Communal Award. But by the White Paper lapsing, the Communal Award must automatically lapse'."

However, Kidwai's main objection was to the composition of the Congress Parliamentary Board which he described as a body nominated by Dr. Ansari and Pandit Malaviya. "The majority of its members are either non-Congressmen or such Congressmen as are opposed to the activities arising out of the decisions of the Lahore Congress. This nominated body has been given complete control over the elected Congress committees. Who is to be the candidate from the Fyzabad constituency is to be decided not by Babu Purushottam Das Tandon, Babu Sri Prakasa, Acharya Narendra Deo and others of the province, but by Mr. Bhulabhai Desai of Bombay, Mr. Satyamurti of Madras, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy of Calcutta and Mr. Asaf Ali of Delhi."

To this a joint secretary of the Central Parliamentary Board issued a rejoinder. He said that the Lahore decision on boycott of legislatures was modified by the A.I.C.C. to the extent that it allowed those who wanted to enter the legislatures to do so, and to guide their activities the Central Parliamentary Board was created.

Asaf Ali was adopted by the Congress as its candidate for the Central Legislative Assembly from Delhi. The choice was significant and courageous. Delhi was a general constituency, not reserved either for Muslim or Non-Muslim candidates. Since Hindus formed about two-thirds of Delhi's electorate, there was the danger of a section of Hindus resenting the idea of adding a Muslim to the already disproportionately large number of Muslims who would occupy elective seats in the Assembly under the British Government's Communal Award of 1932.

Asaf Ali's election from Delhi in the winter of 1934 was not only a personal victory but a vindication of the Congress claim to represent the nationalist aspiration of all communities and of its preference for mixed instead of separate communal electorates. Delhi and Ajmer Mewara were the only two 'General' constituencies, most of the rest being either 'Muhammadian' or 'Non-Muhammadian'. Asaf Ali's opponents were Rai Saheb Nanak Chand, a loyalist and Shiv Narain, candidate of the Delhi Nationalist Party. The Congress had not rejected the Communal Award. While disapproving of separate electorates, the Congress was willing to suffer them till a mutually acceptable alternative scheme was devised by leaders of the two communities. This ambivalent position of the Congress was a handicap for Asaf Ali.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who was heading the Nationalist Party

along with M.S. Aney, said at a large public meeting in Delhi on 29th September 1934: "I have been serving the Congress for the last 50 years. I have held different views on certain occasions but I will not desert the Congress." He wanted that only such candidates should be elected as would oppose both the British Government's White Paper and the Communal Award. Aney, who too addressed the meeting, said: "If you think that separate electorates are an evil, then elect such candidates as will fight for joint electorates in the Assembly." (*Hindustan Times*, Delhi, 30th September 1934).

On 7th October 1934 the *Hindustan Times* (edited at that time by Pothan Joseph) carried an editorial captioned 'Congress Candidate for Delhi' which said: "It is now for the voters of Delhi to compare the claims of the three rivals in the field. Politically, Rai Sahib Nanak Chand is a non-descript whose qualifications cannot count with independent voters. Under the Montford Reforms, Delhi has not had a representative of outstanding ability in the legislature, and Rai Sahib Nanak Chand, with all his amiable traits, is the type of man who has a claim on the Government to serve as a nominated member. Delhi has no provincial legislature for the ventilation of local grievances. The disadvantage makes it doubly incumbent upon the voters of Delhi to choose a man of experience, able to hold his own against the representatives of other provinces. Rai Sahib Nanak Chand being thus ruled out, the competition is between Mr. Asaf Ali, the Congress candidate, and Mr. Shiv Narain, the nominee of the mushroom association known as the 'Delhi Nationalist Party'. Between the two the voters should have no hesitation in supporting Mr. Asaf Ali, both on personal and political grounds.

"While much is made of the importance of winning the confidence of minority communities, there are shortsighted people who cause estrangement by the abuse of majority strength. Delhi has a general electorate with no reservation for any minority and the Hindus against the Musalmans are as three to one on the electoral roll. If personal qualifications count, it is the duty of the majority community to stand down (especially after three consecutive terms) and give the majority an opportunity of feeling that a mixed electorate would not entail suspension of rights. The Nationalist Party has been singularly ill-advised in not leaving the Delhi seat alone after the announcement of Mr Asaf Ali's candidature. His personal qualifications for political and legislative work are unquestioned, and in every conversation on the subject of the election in Delhi, all agree in admitting that Mr Asaf Ali is the 'fittest man'. He has shared the burden of the Congress struggle in the last fourteen years, and he has served the Congress with unflagging loyalty. Since the election programme has been launched under the auspices of the Congress, he has the first claim on the sympathy of the public. Secondly, the reorientation of the Congress policy since the Poona conference has been largely due to his enthusiastic, though at first ill-requited, labours for the Council Entry movement.

"The idea of the Constituent Assembly, adopted by the All India Congress

Committee, originated with him and it would be an ungrateful service on the part of Delhi electors if they excluded from the scene one who has faith in that programme. Thirdly, Mr. Asaf Ali's parliamentary skill and political acumen will be an asset to the Congress party in the Assembly. When confronted with a deadlock, Mr. Asaf Ali has the gift of tackling the difficulty with an ingenuity and resourcefulness reminiscent of the talent which distinguished the late Mr. Rangaswami Iyengar.

"Mr. Shiv Narain is a successful professional man but his public services are nil and he has not been a member of the Congress, a disability which cannot be ignored when the Congress is seeking a vote of confidence from the country... Except in the case of a communal faction transparently veiled by specious reasonings, Mr. Shiv Narain has no appeal to make to the public, and rather than court defeat on false issues, he should reconsider his candidature and recover public esteem by withdrawing in favour of the fittest man Delhi can put up."

On the 19th October it was reported that a number of prominent Hindu and Sikh citizens of Delhi met at Dr. Ansari's residence the previous evening. There was a consensus in favour of Asaf Ali's candidature: "Although the strength of Hindu sentiment against the Communal Award was recognised, it was felt that the outstanding merits of Mr. Asaf Ali entitled him to the support of all the communities." A meeting of members of a Muslim Youth League held on the 25th October under the presidentship of Wahiduddin, a pleader, at his residence in Ballimaran passed a resolution supporting Asaf Ali. Among the active campaigners for the Congress candidate at numerous public meetings were Dr. Ansari, Deshbandhu Gupta, Devadas Gandhi and Dr. Yudhvir Singh.

On 29th October a joint appeal was issued by leading lights of the Congress to the citizens of Delhi who, they said, "should vindicate the principle of the joint electorate by voting for Mr. Asaf Ali who has been selected by the Congress Parliamentary Board, after most careful consideration, to represent both the Hindus and Mussalmans of Delhi at this critical juncture." The signatories were: Rajendra Prasad, president of the Congress; Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel; C. Rajagopalachari; Bhulabhai Desai; Dr. B. C. Roy; Sardar Sardul Singh Cavesheer, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Syed Mahmud; K. F. Nariman; and Sarojini Naidu.

Asaf Ali's opponents entertained the hope that he would be declared ineligible, since he had described himself in the election papers as being 'Indian', and not as a Mussalman. However, lawyers were by and large of the view that declaration of one's religious denomination was not necessary. On 3rd November the Returning Officer overruled the objections raised against Asaf Ali's candidature and accepted the nomination. On the same day, Shiv Narain withdrew from the contest after an appeal by Sardar Patel and Bhulabhai Desai who met him at his residence. Madan Mohan Malaviya, who had campaigned against Asaf Ali in 1926, was also present at this meeting. The way

was now clear for a straight fight between the Congress candidate and his loyalist opponent Nanak Chand.

A crucial factor that helped in making the Delhi contest a straight fight was a joint statement that had been issued by Gandhiji and M.S.Aney on 20th September 1934 calling for avoidance of 'domestic conflict'. Where the candidate either of the Congress Parliamentary Board or the Nationalist Party had the overwhelming chance, the other should be withdrawn.

In reply to a telegram from Asaf Ali seeking Gandhiji's help in getting Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his brother Dr. Khan Saheb, of the North West Frontier Province, to campaign for him in Delhi, Gandhiji wrote on 7th November 1934: "The Khan Brothers I find to be of a most retiring nature. They are disinclined to go anywhere for making speeches. What is the use then of my pressing them to go? You should therefore do the best you can without them. But Dr. Ansari will be presently in your midst, though I do not like the idea of his exercising himself in the present state of his weakness. Why not ask Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad? He ought to shoulder this burden, and he is an effective speaker. I am glad that the atmosphere is clearing for you. I do hope that you will succeed".

At a large meeting of rural voters held in the village of Pooth Khurd, six miles from Delhi and addressed among others by Pandit Indra Vidyavachaspathi, Dr. Sukhdev and Devadas Gandhi, Asaf Ali referred to allegations of police interference. It was stated that intimidation was being employed to scare voters from supporting the Congress candidate. Asaf Ali said that his first task after entering the Assembly, if returned, would be to cause an inquiry to be made into the allegations. Asaf Ali also issued a statement on the subject.

Bhai Parmanand, President of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, said in the course of a statement on 9th November that Rai Sahib Nanak Chand had given an assurance that he would support the Mahasabha policy, and had therefore been adopted as the party's candidate. However, Nanak Chand's reported alliance with a section of Muslims frustrated his effort to woo the Sanatanists (as the Arya Samaj proponents of a reformed Hinduism were known).

Asaf Ali received a telegram from Gandhiji, published by the *Hindustan Times* on 13th November 1934: "I hope every Delhi vote will be cast in your favour." An editorial in the newspaper, on the same day, said: "The contest in Delhi will be an acid test not only of the sympathy which the people have for a Congress candidate of uncommon ability, but also of the readiness of the majority to inspire confidence in the principle of joint electorates... Rumours are being set afloat that official classes favour the Rai Sahib's election, but we would point out that everyone is entitled to record his vote by secret ballot and we are sure that hundreds of Government servants, who appear reserved, will exercise their freedom without fear and vote for Mr. Asaf Ali.

"As a last-minute device, the supporters of the Rai Sahib made up their mind to revive the sinking cause by artificial respiration; they brought Bhai

Parmanand to godfather his candidature. And after a few futile efforts to hold public meetings they have proclaimed him to be a redoubtable champion of Sanatana Dharma. Those who know the Rai Sahib will be amused at all this make-believe....Those who vote for the Rai Sahib in preference to Mr. Asaf Ali will be stultifying the status of Delhi in public life." The newspaper also carried a cartoon by Shankar showing people carrying a banner with the words, 'Vote for Asaf Ali', Nanak Chank drowning in water and the Hindu Mahasabha holding out a straw to save him.

After the election process was completed, Asaf Ali was on 19th November 1934 declared elected by a big margin: he polled 3424 valid votes, as against 949 votes secured by Nanak Chand. The *Hindustan Times* said editorially: "The election in Delhi possessed a significance all its own. In the first place it was a straight fight between the Congress candidate and another who, whatever his professions, was for all practical purposes the nominee of the Government. That at the very headquarters of the Government of India the people should have demonstrated that they are with the Congress and the policy for which it stands, and not for the policy of 'right-handed repression and left-handed concession' (archaic, or jocular, for 'called') the dual policy is a matter of sincere satisfaction."

"The return of Mr. Asaf Ali is also a vindication of the principle of joint electorate. The Congress by setting up Mr. Asaf Ali, and the people of Delhi by electing him by a huge majority have shown that it is not the faith to which a man belongs that counts, but the service he has done in the past and his capacity to serve his people in the future. Mr. Asaf Ali is of the few Congress leaders who strove might and main to induce the Congress to lift the boycott of the legislatures and to carry the fight right into the Government's camp. And it is in the fitness of things that he should be there in the Assembly to demonstrate the efficacy of the policy in which he believes."

Asaf Ali received a spate of congratulatory telegrams from, among other friends, S.A. Brelvi, K.M. Munshi and M.C. Chagla. Sardar Patel said: "Hearty congratulations to yourself and Delhi citizens. Please convey, specially to Hindus, my appreciation in resisting attempts to misguide them and for vindicating the principle of joint electorates."

The crowning message was from Gandhiji, who wrote to Asaf Ali: "God is great. I can trace nothing but the hand of God in all these successes. May we deserve them! How I wish your success will lead to heart unity between the two brothers: Hindu and Mussalman!"

## As People's Tribune

The following excerpts from the proceedings of the Central Legislative Assembly illustrate the atmosphere of the debates and the cut-and-thrust between the official and the Congress members. On 15th August 1938 the Defence

Secretary C.M.G.Ogilvie moved a Bill to amend the criminal law. The preamble said: "Whereas it is expedient to supplement the criminal law by providing for the punishment of certain acts prejudicial to the recruitment of persons to serve in, and to the discipline of, His Majesty's Forces..." The Bill provided for punishment, by imprisonment, for speeches asking people not to join the army and if they must, to join it with the intention of revolting and fighting on the other side.

S.Satyamurti quoted the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, as saying: "The Canadian Parliament reserves to itself the right to declare in the light of the circumstances existing at the time, to what extent, if at all, Canada will participate in conflicts in which other members of the Commonwealth may be engaged." Satyamurti went on to ask: "Would the Defence Secretary accuse Mackenzie King of want of loyalty when he said that?"

Ogilvie: "Most certainly not."

Satyamurti: "I have got enough. I am content with that answer. What is meat for Canada is poison for India!"

Asaf Ali said in the course of his speech during the debate that if recruitment was declining, the reasons were: (1) That Indian soldiers were poorly paid even as a mercenary army, and were discriminated against in pay and allowances and in conditions of work; and (2) that it was not a national army but one which must "go and get slaughtered according to the wishes of someone who is six thousand miles away." Recalling the instances of Lord Morley and of John Burns, who resigned from the British government in 1914 because they would not sign the death warrant of Englishmen and other human beings, Asaf Ali asked: "Why do you want to imitate the worst fascist countries whom you want to fight--to preserve democracy, freedom of speech and liberty of conscience?... We do want the most efficient army for India and for India's defence. But that army must be an Indian army."

Asaf Ali pointed out that India had made a heavy contribution in men and money and material during World War I, and asked: "What did we get in return? We got in return an irresponsible and unresponsive executive sitting opposite us, and we also got kicks throughout the Empire. Is there a single Dominion where Indians are treated as equal citizens of the Empire?"

The Bill, Asaf Ali said, was intended for an imperialist war -- "by which we mean a war which may result in more or less the same kind of morass in which we find ourselves today, that is to say our freedom or want of freedom left where it is, or perhaps curtailed a little more. The war, Asaf Ali continued, was "between the allies of Great Britain and the Totalitarian Governments. They are four, but I leave out Russia because it is on the side of the so-called democracies. Leaving out Russia, we have got Germany, Italy and Japan." Asaf Ali went on to envisage where actions were likely to take place, and mentioned the French possessions in North Africa: "It is that kind of war for which you want us to will away the freedom of everybody."

Another debate during 1938 was on a resolution moved by Maulana Shaukat Ali for a review of action taken on the report of the committee headed by Lt.Gen. Sir Andrew Skeen (in 1926), popularly known as the Indian Sandhurst Committee. The resolution, moved on 2nd September 1938, read: "That this Assembly recommends to the Governor-General in Council that early steps be taken to constitute a committee of the elected and other members of the Central Legislature" to review the implementation of the scheme proposed by the Indian Sandhurst Committee to consider "whether the success achieved (in Indianisation of the army at the officer level) is not sufficiently solid to warrant a further acceleration of the rate of progress."

During the Defence Secretary, C.M.G Ogilvie's intervention in the debate, the following exchange took place:

Asaf Ali: "Is there a single Indian in the Army Headquarters?"

Ogilvie: "Not yet."

On the same day--2nd september 1938--a resolution was moved by Raizada Hansraj asking for a committee of members of the Central Legislature to examine the arrangements in force for financial control of military expenditure. Satyamurti, while speaking on the resolution, wanted officials to be excluded from the proposed committee. Financial control, he said, was pre-eminently a matter for the elected members of any popular House.

A member: "Why?"

Satyamurti: "Because we represent lakhs of taxpayers here, while you represent only the tax-spenders."

Sir James Grigg (Finance Member): "I pay much more tax than you do."

Satyamurti: "I know you do, but you get much more than I do, out of my own country--and that is the tragedy of it. I can be in your place and do the work much better, but yet you are there because you are you, and I am I..."

Sir Abdur Rahman (in the Chair): "Let us have no personal comparisons."

Satyamurthi: "Very well, Sir. But he started it... We spend 45 or 50 crores on Defence year after year; and yet our control over the defence expenditure is next to nothing."

There would sometimes be lively exchanges between the Congress and the Muslim League members of the Central Legislative Assembly. On 24th August 1938, the Congress opposed a Criminal Law Amendment Bill brought forward by the Government, while the Muslim League joined official members in supporting it. In the course of the debate, Muhammad Nauman of the Muslim League said: "Mr.Satyamurthi has accused us just now of being proud of holding the balance of power (between the Government and the Congress) in this House. Ever since we entered this House in 1935 we have always voted for what we conscientiously thought was the correct and just position...We are responsible to our constituencies for the way in which we conduct ourselves in this House and for the way in which we vote in the House. Our Muslim friends in the Congress camp know what their position is, and we challenge them..."

Asaf Ali, responding to the provocative remark by the Muslim League member, said: "Let me assure him that insofar as the Muslim members of the Congress Party are concerned, theirs is a position of responsibility in the party and they exercise their responsibility with due care. It is not merely a matter of party discipline that we are against this Bill but out of deep conviction."

Maulana Zafar Ali Khan: "We have voted as representatives of Muslim India."

Asaf Ali: "I am as much a Muslim as my friend, Maulana Zafar Ali, and perhaps a better one."

When the motion was put to vote, it was adopted by 63 votes against 55. The 'Ayes' included M.A.Jinnah and other Muslim Leaguers, the European members, official members, and also Maulana Shaukat Ali. The 'Noes' included Asaf Ali and other Congress members, as well as M.S.Aney.

It was perfectly true that the Muslim League held the balance of power in the Central Legislative Assembly. For instance, on 7th February 1939, an official motion was defeated because the Muslim League chose to join hands with the Congress. The motion was to the effect that a "Bill to provide for the discipline of members of the Indian Naval Reserve Force raised in British India on behalf of His Majesty be taken into consideration." When the House divided, the Ayes numbered 45 and they included Girija Shankar Bajpai and Muhammad Zafrullah Khan. But they were outnumbered by the Noes who totalled 56. They included Asaf Ali, M.A.Jinnah, N.M.Joshi, Bhulabhai Desai and Choudhry Mohammad Ismail Khan.

A nation-wide hartal was observed in April 1937 as a mark of protest against the bringing into force of a new Constitution in the form of the Government of India Act passed by the British parliament in 1935. The incidents on that day in Delhi resulted in Asaf Ali bringing forward a censure motion relating to "the rough handling of a respectable Congress woman by two European policemen, deliberately insulting the National Flag and other acts of grave provocation calculated to disturb the peaceful demonstration of the citizens of Delhi."

Moving the censure motion, Asaf Ali quoted a newspaper account on preparations made by the police for preventing suspension of business. At the Congress office someone brought a Congress flag which had broken off, with its rod, from the bonnet of a car and was then trampled under foot by a policeman in the presence of a police officer. Asaf Ali showed the torn flag and the rod to the House. He also referred to the arrest of Smt.Satyavati. Two Europeans had put their hands on her shoulder so heavily as to tear her blouse, he said, amidst cries of 'shame'.

J.A.Thorne, speaking on behalf of the Government, said that she had been inciting mill hands to cease work, and was pushing some workers who were trying to enter the mill. The Assistant Superintendent laid his hand on her shoulder and told her that she was under arrest. The Government spokesman



also claimed that there was stoning of the police by the crowd. As regards the flag incident, he had asked the police officer concerned, one Scott, and the officer had denied that his orderly had trampled on the flag.

In the debate that ensued, Maulana Shaukat Ali said that his party had decided to work the new constitution for what it was worth, and he did not therefore join the demonstration. But the incidents if true were bad, and the Government deserved censure. M.S.Aney denounced the misbehaviour with a woman demonstrator. Chapman Nortimer, of the European Group, said that the tricolour represented only a particular political party, and it could not be called the National Flag. Women participating in politics, he went on, should be prepared to face the rough with the smooth, and run the risks incidental to public life. But he agreed that no undue force should be used against them.

The censure motion was adopted by 61 votes to 40. The House then adjourned with nothing more by way of consequence since there was no popular government which the adoption of such a motion would have brought down. Nevertheless, it was a symbolic defeat for the British regime, and an example of the kind of crisis creation which Asaf Ali had envisaged while commending Council entry in his letter of 30th September 1933 to Jawaharlal Nehru.

In a number of entries in the Prison Diary he maintained at Ahmadnagar, Asaf Ali recalled his role in the Central Legislative Assembly since 1934:

*16th October 1942.* Right from the commencement of my career as a legislator--or rather as a nationalist representative of my country--in the Central Assembly, I devoted much of my attention to Defence and Foreign Affairs. The two go hand in hand; you cannot separate one from the other. And gradually I established a reputation as the Congress expert and spokesman on these subjects. Even the Government benches began to pay attention to what I said.

*3rd March 1943.* Today they are trying to make out that we wanted to paralyse India's defence! My own speeches during the past five years in the Assembly will show who had neglected India's defence. They used to ridicule my passionate denunciation of what I regarded as the Government's "criminal complacency".

Heaven alone knows how many speeches I have delivered. The only recorded speeches are those in the Assembly, and with a couple of exceptions they are brief and of unsatisfactory standard. I went to the Assembly with a good reputation as a speaker, but the restrictive rules threw me off my saddle, while the need to maintain discipline in the Congress Assembly Party and set an example to those who were clamouring for opportunities to speak, were self-imposed limitations.

When you are on an Opposition bench, the biggest handicap is the paucity of 'matter' unless you are insensitive to irrelevance and do not mind claptrap and the usual vitriolic vituperation. I indulged in this species of tub-thumping in the early phase of my public life, but somehow, even

when I held audiences spell-bound, or drew tears or cheers from them, I felt ashamed of stump oratory. Since July 1923, when I faced an audience after emerging from my first imprisonment of 18 months, I discarded this trick of the speaker's trade. Even at the risk of leaving my audiences cold, I tried to encourage on the part of my hearers an unimpassioned consideration of solid facts.

I must confess my failure, after twenty years' experience, with large audiences. They expect and appreciate fireworks. Even if you give them information of the weightiest character, they remain dissatisfied. They expect you to hold their attention with resounding phrases: a blow at the idea or person or institution they hate, or hyperbolic praise of what they hold dear or in high estimation.

As in the 1934 elections to the Central Legislative Assembly, the Congress swept the polls in the greater part of British India when elections were held in 1936-37 to the provincial Assemblies. But the party had not yet decided what it should do with the mandate it received.

The A.I.C.C. met at Delhi on 17-18 March 1937 to consider the question of office acceptance under the Government of India Act of 1935. Though this Act conceded a considerable measure of provincial autonomy, the exercise of power by the popular Ministries was subject to intervention by the Governor even in respect of powers not reserved for him. Secondly, the federal part of the scheme was to be brought into force only when rulers accounting for half of the population of princely states agreed to join the Federation. The Congress, which had contested the election while keeping open the issue of office acceptance, was in a position to form Ministries in eight provinces: Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Central Provinces, Madras, N.W.F.P., Orissa and the United Provinces.

The Working Committee was divided on the issue. Jawaharlal Nehru was prominent among those opposed to acceptance of office. But the Working Committee adopted a resolution, which was then placed before the A.I.C.C., authorising the Congress legislature parties to form Ministries if they could secure assurance that the Governor would not interfere in the normal working of the popular government. The resolution was opposed among others by K.F.Nariman and M.R.Masani. Prominent among the supporters of the resolution were Bhulabhai Desai and S.Satyamurti.

If press reporters were correct, Satyamurti said, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had said: 'To hell with the Constitution.' But he could not send it there by a curse, even though he was a Brahmin. As for 'revolutionary' and 'reformist' mentalities, if he (Satyamurti) could reduce the poverty and ignorance in the country, if he could add one pie to the earnings of Indians by the possession of the 'reformist' mentality, he would not hesitate to plead guilty to that mentality.

The issue was clinched when Gandhiji supported the formation of popular Ministries in the provinces. He did so on the ground that Congressmen in power

would be able to implement certain items of the constructive programme such as Khadi, village industries and Prohibition, and could also reduce the burden of taxation on the peasants. Acceptance also of the Federal part of the 1935 Act was urged by the Hindu Mahasabha. B.S.Moonje wrote to Gandhiji on 20th July 1939 urging him "to accept the present Federation in spite of all its defects, and use it as a jumping ground for further quarrels and gains."

Asaf Ali was of one mind with Congress Liberals like C.Rajagopalachari (who headed the popular Ministry in Madras), Bhulabhai Desai and S.Satyamurti who supported office acceptance in 1937. Asaf Ali felt in retrospect: "The entire war period should have been devoted to parliamentary activity, with popular organisations such as A.R.P. and associations for relief of sufferers from famine, flood and epidemics working hand in hand with, and strengthening the popular governments. In the end would have come the reward--or otherwise struggle." (*Against Vegetating in Prison*, Chapter VII).

In contrast, Jawaharlal Nehru--true to his then Marxist form--said in the course of a letter of 25th November 1937 to Govind Ballabh Pant who headed the government in the United Provinces: "If I may put it in technical language, the Congress Ministries are tending to become counter-revolutionary." A more mature Jawaharlal Nehru was to acknowledge later: "I was perhaps unnecessarily hard on the Congress Ministries....Among the many good things that they did was the agrarian legislation they passed, giving considerable relief to the peasantry."

## Muslim Separatism: Congress Ambivalence

The Marxist outlook also bred in Jawaharlal Nehru, who was insufficiently acquainted with the dynamics of Indian society, a facile optimism that the economic approach would solve the Hindu-Muslim problem. This served to confirm and deepen the ambiguity that had marked the Congress attitude towards Muslim separatism ever since the first decade of the 20th century when the poisonous seed of separate electorates was sown by the British rulers.

When the 29th annual session of the Congress met at Lahore in 1909, the Indian Councils Act of 1909 incorporating the Minto-Morley 'reforms' had just come into force. The Congress recorded disapproval of the creation of separate electorates under this Act and the excessive weightage given to Muslims in the Councils. By the time of the next Congress session, "separate electorates had already begun to bear fruit and there were communal disturbances."<sup>5</sup> The Allahabad Congress of 1910 strongly deprecated the proposed expansion of the number of separate electorates by applying the principle to municipal and district board elections.

However, by the time of the Lucknow Congress session in 1916, the Muslim League had accepted the goal of self-government and Muslims, incensed by the treatment of Turkey by Britain and its allies during World War

I, were prepared to join hands with the Congress. In the interest of forging a united front to press for self-government, the Congress did a volte-face and entered into a pact with the Muslim League which conceded separate electorates for Muslims. In a further departure from democratic principle, the Lucknow Pact envisaged weightage in representation for Muslims in the Central Assembly as well as in the legislatures of provinces in which Muslims formed a minority of the population. In Bengal and Punjab where Muslims were in a majority, they would get fewer seats than their population strength would entitle them to. This was ostensibly to allay the fears of the non-Muslims.

An alternative both to separate and to joint electorates was available, and could have been canvassed by the Congress as a *via media*. This was the reservation of seats for Muslims in legislatures, by providing that only Muslim candidates could offer themselves for election from certain constituencies though the choice between the competing candidates would be made by eligible voters belonging to all communities. This approach was commended by Dr. M. A. Ansari in the early 1920's as a way to remove minority fears of being swamped by the majority, without abandoning the democratic basis of territorial, multi-communal electorates. Asaf Ali agreed with this solution and advocated it as a means of allaying the minority's fears of under-representation and yet avoiding the competitive communalism that was being generated by separate electorates. In the course of his presidential address at a two-day Delhi Provincial Congress session which opened at Meerut on 7th March 1924, Asaf Ali said that he was for the establishment of common electorates with a temporary provision for the reservation of seats so that adequate representation of the minorities was assured. But he was against separate electorates. (Reservation of seats on the basis of a common electorate is precisely what the Indian Constitution of 1950 provides for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes). But the formula of reservation of seats for Muslims on the basis of joint electorates was not pursued by the Congress with vigour.

The next landmark was the constitutional scheme drawn up in 1928 by the Motilal Nehru Committee, established by an all-parties conference as the nationalist answer to the all-white Simon Commission sent to India by the British Government. The Nehru Report, as it came to be referred to, asserted once again the democratic principle of territorial constituencies in which citizens of all religious communities would choose their representative. But Jawaharlal Nehru was unhappy with the report known after his father's name because, as a political radical, he was strongly opposed to the Dominion Status which it envisaged. At the Calcutta-session of the Congress in December 1928, the Nehru Report was the principal subject of discussion and opinion was divided. A compromise was reached. It was resolved that if the British Government did not give effect to the recommendations of the Nehru Committee within a year, the Congress would launch Satyagraha for complete independence. Since the British failed to respond, the Lahore Congress of December 1929--

over which Jawaharlal Nehru presided--passed a resolution which set forth complete independence as the Congress objective.

Mightily pleased with the rejection of Dominion Status, Jawaharlal Nehru threw out the baby of joint electorates along with the bathwater. He said in the course of his presidential address at the Lahore Congress on 29th December 1929: "It is inconceivable to me that in a free India the Hindus can ever be powerless. So far as I am concerned I would gladly ask our Muslim and Sikh friends to take what they will, without protest or argument from me. I know that the time is coming soon when these labels and appellations will have little meaning and when our struggle will be on an economic basis. Meanwhile it matters little what our mutual arrangements are, provided only that we do not build up barriers which will come in the way of our future progress."

But separate electorates were already a formidable barrier. That is what Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew had said in his welcome address as Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Lahore Congress: "Let there be a general provision in the future Constitution to the effect that any question relating to religion or religious culture should not be decided in the case of objection, unless a fixed number of members professing that religion, and present in the meeting, gave their support." This, in his opinion, would afford better protection than the "vicious and barbarous system" of separate representation on communal lines.

On 1st January 1930, the concluding day of the Lahore Congress, Jawaharlal moved from the chair the following resolution which was adopted without discussion: "In view of the lapse of the Nehru Report it is unnecessary to declare the policy of the Congress regarding communal questions, the Congress believing that in an independent India communal questions can only be solved on strictly national lines. But as the Sikhs in particular, and the Muslims and other minorities in general, have expressed dissatisfaction over the solution of communal questions proposed in the Nehru Report, this Congress assures the Sikhs, the Muslims and other minorities that no solution thereof in any future Constitution will be acceptable to the Congress that does not give full satisfaction to the parties concerned." This, was a blank cheque for separatist politics. It amounted to saying: 'Secularism as the ideal, and appeasement of communalism as immediate policy.'

The approach of seat reservation, with joint electorates, was revived in 1931. M.A. Ansari, in association with Pandit Malaviya and Sardar Sardul Singh, drew up a scheme which came to be known as the Ansari Formula. It provided for reserved seats for Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in provinces where they formed less than 25% of the population, with joint electorates and adult suffrage. But this formula, which would have combined reassurance for the minorities without fomenting separatism, was not earnestly pursued.

The next major development was the Communal Award handed down by the British Government in 1932. As noticed earlier, it perpetuated separate electorates and gave Muslims, who formed 25% of the population of British

India at the 1931 census, one-third of the seats in the central legislature.

Despite the illogic of the Communal Award and its obvious aim of keeping Hindus and Muslims divided, Gandhiji advised the Congress not to reject it. This was of a piece with the self-abnegation and generosity to the adversary which Gandhiji was habitually inclined to advocate. Howsoever saintly the intention, the effect was to strengthen Muslim intransigence.

In the course of an article on 'Hindu Muslim tension: its cause and cure' in *Young India* of 29th May 1924 (following the communal riots which broke out after the euphoria of the Khilafat movement evaporated), Gandhiji had said: "There is no doubt in my mind that in the majority of quarrels the Hindus come out second best. My own experience but confirms the opinion that the Mussalman as a rule is a bully, and the Hindu as a rule is a coward...Between violence and cowardly flight, I can only prefer violence to cowardice...Those Hindus who ran away to save their lives would have been truly non-violent and would have covered themselves with glory and added lustre to their faith and won the friendship of their Mussalman assailants if they had stood bare breast with smiles on their lips, and died at their post."

Gandhiji returned to the theme of converting the adversary through self-immolation in the course of a speech at Surat on 5th September 1924. Referring to the injury suffered by Jamnalal Bajaj when he intervened to pacify two angry groups of Hindus and Muslims, Gandhiji said: "Jamnalalji's hand was injured. It made me happy. If he had been killed while stopping the conflict, even then I would have been happy...If Jamnalalji had died, both the feuding groups would have felt ashamed and would have wept for him. You should win the hearts of Muslims by such display of courage."

Again, speaking in Hindi at a meeting of Gandhi Seva Sangh at Brindaban in Bihar on 3rd May 1939, Gandhiji said he had been asked "what we should do in the face of considerable opposition to Gandhian thought and the needless poisoning of minds in Maharashtra...We should purify ourselves. If things are going wrong in Maharashtra, let us kill Shankerrao Deo. If things are going wrong in Karnataka, let us kill Gangadharrao. Do you agree, Shankerrao and Gangadharrao?" (They nodded their heads in agreement, says a footnote on p.200 of Vol. 69 of the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.)

Gandhiji's advice on non-rejection of the Communal Award was accepted by the Congress Parliamentary Board when, following the withdrawal of the civil disobedience movement, it met at Bombay on 16th June 1934. On the following day the Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution which said that the British Government's White Paper "falls far short of the Congress goal...The only satisfactory alternative to the White Paper is a Constitution drawn up by a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage, or as near it as possible, with the power, if necessary, to the important minorities to have their representatives elected exclusively by the electors belonging to such minorities." Congress acceptance of separate electorates was thus reaf-

firmed.

M.A.Ansari, who had mooted in the 1920's the formula of reservation of seats for Muslims in the legislatures, but with joint electorates comprising voters belonging to all communities, later tried another approach when he formed a Muslim Nationalist Party. This was in recognition of separate electorates as a fact of life which the British authorities were not going to change. In constituencies where only Muslims could vote, he saw that a nationalist Muslim party would have a better chance than the Congress whose membership (reflecting the country's population) was overwhelmingly Hindu. Choudhury Khaliquzzaman of the United Provinces thought on the same lines. A colleague of Asaf Ali's on the Congress Parliamentary Board, Khaliquzzaman organised a Muslim Unity Front--which unequivocally accepted the Communal Award--to sponsor candidates against the Muslim League. He succeeded in fair measure. Govind Ballabh Pant wrote to Khaliquzzaman after the Central Assembly elections of 1934: "The credit for securing the return of a good number of Nationalists to the Assembly from among the progressive Muslims belongs to you." Profiting from the lesson, the Congress could have encouraged an all-India nationalist Muslim party that would accept the system of separate electorates and fight elections as a force friendly to but distinct from the Congress. The argument for nationalist Muslims offering themselves for election on behalf of a Muslim party rather than the Congress, in constituencies where only Muslims would vote, was spelt out by Choudhry Khaliquzzaman in the course of a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru: "No one can deny the Congress the right to contest Muslim seats even during the existence of the Communal Award and separate electorates. But in the larger interest of the country I think it would have been preferable to leave the Muslims to send their representatives from their own platform. Unfortunately I have not been able to persuade you to agree with this view....The Muslim Congress candidate and his supporters must proclaim themselves to be as good and pious Muslims as their opponents, the Muslim Leaguers, and all the religious zeal of the belligerents must be brought into play to carry the electorate with them."<sup>6</sup> But political realism was not the forte either of Mahatma Gandhi or of Jawaharlal Nehru, the two who, in that order, mattered in the Congress. One was a man of religion who believed in unilateral generosity and acted as his inner voice prompted him; and the other was naively optimistic that what he called the economic approach would solve the Hindu-Muslim problem.

The Congress continued to think that it could win Muslim votes by denouncing separate electorates in principle but conceding them in practice. In its manifesto for the 1936 elections to provincial assemblies under the Government of India Act of 1935, the Congress reiterated its belief that the Communal Award was 'anti-national'. But it went on to say that a change in or supersession of the communal decision should only be brought about by mutual agreement of the parties concerned. In effect, Muslim separatists were given the power to

veto progress towards the realisation of an Indian national political entity.

When there was a movement early in 1939 for responsible government in Rajkot, a principality in the Kathiawar region of what is now Gujarat, the Hindu ruler found it convenient to cpte the fears of the Muslim minority while turning down the demand for popular government. Gandhiji said on that occassion that the special interests of the Muslims would be safeguarded, and that "if they wanted separate electorates in Rajkot with reservation of seats, I would see to it that they got them."

Thus the Congress and Gandhiji were consistent in their pronenss to cave in on the issue of special treatment of the Muslim minority as a separate entity even though, as Gandhiji said to Louis Fischer when the American journalist interviewed him during June 1942, "Every Muslim will have a Hindu name if he goes back far enough in his family history."

## NOTES

1. Mushirul Hasan, op. cit.
2. *Fragments from the past* (p.441) by Aruna Asaf Ali, Patriot Publishers, 1989.
3. *From Purdah to Parliament* by Shaista Ikramullah, Cresset Press, London, 1963.
4. *Mahatma* (Vol.III, p.262) by D.G.Tendulkar.
5. *100 Years of the Congress*, (p. 209), All India Congress Committee, New Delhi, 1985.
6. *Pathway to Pakistan* by Choudhry Khaliquzzaman.



## **7. World War II: Congress Negativism**

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The Congress adopted a zig-zag course of policy from 1920, with a stop-go approach to mass struggle and the parliamentary path, and oscillation during World War II between forceful anti-Fascism and pacifism. This can be understood only if it is realised that the Congress--uniquely in the history of major political parties of the world--placed itself for a quarter-century in the hands of one who was a political leader sometimes acting like any other (as when he saw Subhas Chandra Bose out of Congress presidentship in 1939); a self-mortifying saint-in-the making; and a realised saint. Gandhiji was these three not in any chronological sequence, but was one or the other at different points of time in relation to different issues.

His two great gifts to his people, and to the world, proceeded from the realised saint in him. One was the overcoming of fear in resisting injustice, whether of foreign rule or the domestic curse of untouchability, and the other was compassion for the dispossessed and the deprived. He instilled courage into an unarmed people and led them in a struggle that was by and large peaceful, against the world's most powerful colonial empire of the first half of the 20th century. The example inspired Martin Luther King in his campaign to secure equal rights for Negro citizens of the U.S.A., and will doubtless influence others in future. Gandhiji's compassion for the wretched of the earth is stated simply and powerfully in the 'talisman' that he offered in August 1947: "When in doubt, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him."

Alongside Gandhiji's propagation of the values of courage and compassion, the saint-in-the-making and the political leader in him generated a large number of questionable propositions, on subjects ranging from the burning of foreign cloth, celibacy and dietetics to a literal and dogmatic non-violence. He

would change his position on many a subject, but was prone to argue for his position at a given time in the language of final certitude.

An early instance was during the Khilafat and non-cooperation movement. At the Khilafat Conference in Delhi in November 1919, he argued against a resolution calling for boycott of British goods. He regarded it as economic punishment, and since his creed was to avoid injury of any kind he could not countenance it. A second, less fundamental argument adduced by Gandhiji was that a boycott only of British goods would merely encourage imports from other countries such as Japan whose wares were found increasingly in the Indian market. The Muslim Khilafatists disregarded Gandhiji's advice and adopted the boycott resolution. In a year's time Gandhiji changed his mind about boycott. Item 5 of the 11-point programme of non-cooperation put forward by him before the country in January 1921 called on business men to give up trade in foreign goods and to sever foreign connections as soon as possible. The boycott of all foreign, rather than only British goods met Gandhiji's subsidiary objection to the Khilafatist resolution of November 1919. But he gave up his principal objection to boycott as punishment impelled by anger. Bonfires of foreign cloth followed.

Gandhiji's pacifism during World War II was in striking contrast to his attitude during the war that broke out in 1914. Though Gandhiji had conducted his first experiments in Satyagraha in South Africa on strictly non-violent lines, on his final return to India in January 1915 he toured his native Gujarat to exhort young men to enlist in the Army. His argument was, as he put it in a speech at Surat on 1st August 1918: "We are not entitled to demand Swaraj till we come forward to enlist in the army... We would have equal rights in the Empire; if so, we should rescue it from the threat to which it is now exposed, and then alone shall we be considered fit for them. There is a party which argues that the British Government should first concede our right to Swaraj, grant equal rights in the army and in other matters, and then alone should we help it. The party making this demand is not to be dismissed out of hand. But the snag in this argument is that the Empire is not dependent on your help."

It turned out in World War II also that the British--with massive American aid--were able to do without help from the Congress in India. It is a different matter that the war left Britain too enfeebled to hold on to the Indian empire by force. In the meanwhile, however, the Muslim League basked in the sunshine of British patronage during the war years when the Congress with its non-cooperation policy elected to go under a cloud. An unintended consequence of Congress negativism was that it contributed to the partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

In the Prison Diary maintained by Jawaharlal Nehru and Asaf Ali at Ahmadnagar during 1942-45, both express disappointment with Gandhiji's leadership and his change of position with regard to a mass movement in the middle of the war. Asaf Ali is more forthright in his criticism. He also explains

why he acquiesced in decisions he did not agree with: loyalty to colleagues and to the Congress organisation, and the likelihood that if he turned his back on them, it might be misconstrued as wishing to avoid a fresh term of imprisonment.

In the early phase of World War II, any kind of mass non-cooperation was far from Gandhiji's mind. He wrote: "I hold the opinion strongly that whilst by their own action the British Government have made it impossible for the Congress to cooperate with them in the prosecution of the war, the Congress must not embarrass them. I do not desire anarchy in the country. Independence will never come through it." (*Harijan*, 4th November 1939.)

Again: "Strange as it may appear to Congressmen, I make bold to suggest that the one way to disarm communal suspicion is not to offer civil disobedience in terms of Swaraj. The prospect that is about to face the country is that of the British Government in alliance with the so-called minorities arrayed against the Congress single-handed. Civil disobedience against this combination is a contradiction in terms. It would not even be civil war. It would be criminal war." (*Harijan*, 11th November 1939.)

From this emphatically stated position, Gandhiji was to take up the opposite, with equal conviction, as the war brought severe reverses for the Allies in Europe as well as in Asia and the Japanese advanced steadily towards India. Gandhiji was utterly disillusioned by the racial discrimination practised by the British authorities even while retreating from Burma, with Indian evacuees being subjected to bitter hardships. This, combined with his pacifism, his belief that the Japanese would not invade India if the British left, and his faith in the efficacy of non-violent resistance if the Japanese should invade India, made him formulate the Quit India demand. It was a decision for which he was primarily responsible. The decision was acquiesced in by some members of the Congress Working Committee with varying degrees of mental reservation, and quite uncritically by the so-called 'Gandhians'.

The national leaders were faced with the dilemma of either helping the British in a war for the preservation of their empire or, by refusing cooperation, appearing to be assisting the Fascist Powers. An acceptable declaration of war aims about India would have enabled the Congress to co-operate in the war effort with self-respect. But the colonial authorities in India, and the British Government in London, were obdurate.

On the outbreak of hostilities on 3rd September 1939, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, declared that India was at war. The Congress took exception to his doing so without a reference of the matter to the Central Legislative Assembly. The Congress Working Committee, meeting at Wardha from 8th to 15th September 1938, called upon Congress members of the Central Assembly to refrain from attending the next session. Describing Fascism and Nazism as but the intensification of imperialism, the resolution of the Working Committee said that issues of war and peace must be decided by the Indian people.

On 10th October 1939 the All India Congress Committee approved a resolution on the war, drafted by the Working Committee, for adoption by the provincial Assemblies in which the Congress commanded a majority: "While this Assembly has the fullest sympathy for the cause of democracy and freedom, and condemns the aggression of the Nazi Government on Poland, it cannot offer cooperation in the war unless the principles of democracy are applied to India and her policy is guided by her people. The Assembly invites the British Government to make a clear declaration that they have decided to regard India as an independent nation entitled to frame her own Charter of Freedom, and to accompany this declaration by suitable action, in so far as this is possible, even in the prevailing war conditions. The Assembly is further of opinion that no war measure or other activity should be undertaken in this province except with the consent and through the medium of the Provincial Government".

Since the demand was not met by the British Government, on 22nd October 1939 the Working Committee called upon Congress Ministries to tender resignation. They promptly bowed out.

### **Between Anti-Fascism and Pacifism**

Meeting at Poona in July 1940 in the wake of the Nazi conquest of Northern and Western Europe and the bombing of Britain, the Congress Working Committee offered "to throw in its full weight in the efforts for the efficient organisation of the defence of the country" if there was an unequivocal declaration as to India's independence and a provisional national government was formed at the Centre. This meant a parting of the ways with Gandhiji whose position now was out-and-out pacifist. Rajaji took the lead in formulating the offer of cooperation, and won over Sardar Patel. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan stood by the creed of total non-violence, while the majority held that the policy of non-violence adopted by the Congress was only for the purpose of the struggle for independence. Five members proffered resignation. On Gandhiji's advice they acquiesced in the majority decision to offer conditional cooperation in the war effort.

The Poona offer of cooperation with the war effort was revoked by the A.I.C.C. at Bombay on 16th September 1940. Gandhiji was invited to resume leadership of the Congress, which he had resigned when the Congress, as perceived by Gandhians, 'lowered the flag of pacifism' at Poona. The Bombay resolution sought to restore "the policy and practice of non-violence not only in the struggle for Swaraj but, so far as this may be possible of application, in free India." This reiteration of pacifism, even if qualified by the words 'so far as this (non-violence) may be possible of application', enabled Gandhiji to take up the leadership of the Congress again. He proceeded to organise the Individual Satyagraha of 1940-41. Commenced on 17th October 1940, it asserted "the right to preach against war as war, or participation in the present war."

So long as the hostilities were far off from India, even Congress Liberals like Rajaji and Asaf Ali had been willing to go along with the policy of non-cooperation with the war effort and of symbolic Individual Satyagraha. But with Japan beginning to over-run Anglo-American possessions in Asia, apart from the continuing attacks on China, and advancing towards India, the position changed radically. Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Rajaji and Asaf Ali were prominent among those who could no longer adopt a pacifist position in the face of the mounting Axis threat. When the Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli in December 1941-- after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941--the discussion in the Committee opened Gandhiji's eyes to the fact that his lieutenants were not ready for total and literal pacifism. He retired again from active leadership of the Congress.

The course of the war induced rethinking in Britain. The value of mobilising India's vast manpower and material resources in aid of the Allies was realised. The outcome of this realisation was the despatch of Sir Stafford Cripps, a Labour member of the wartime coalition Cabinet of Britain, on a mission to India in March 1942. The proposals brought by Cripps envisaged the formation of a constituent assembly in British India at the end of the war, to be elected by the provincial legislatures. This body would be free to decide on secession from the British Commonwealth if it wanted complete independence. The princely States in India would be free but under no obligation to join an Indian Union, while any province which wished to contract out of the Constitution of the Indian Union would be free to do so and 'to retain its present constitutional position, provision being made for its subsequent accession if it so desires'.

It was during and immediately in the wake of the Cripps Mission that the Congress exhibited in a dramatic manner its long-standing ambivalence towards Muslim separatism. The Muslim League had formulated its demand for Pakistan, on the basis of the two-nation theory, in a resolution adopted by it at Lahore on 24th March 1940. The Cripps proposals conceded Pakistan in principle by providing for the right of provinces to secede. But it was not on this ground that the Congress rejected the Cripps offer. On the contrary, the Working Committee, which was in continuous session in Delhi during the negotiations, communicated to Cripps on 2nd April 1942 and released to the Press on 10th April a resolution which, howsoever reluctantly, accepted the principle of self-determination. The resolution said on this subject: "The acceptance beforehand of the novel principle of non-accession for a province is a severe blow to the conception of Indian unity and an apple of discord likely to generate growing trouble in the provinces, and which may well lead to further difficulties in the way of the Indian states merging themselves in the Indian Union. The Congress has been wedded to Indian freedom and unity, and any break in that unity, especially in the modern world when people's minds

inevitably think in terms of ever larger federations, would be injurious to all concerned and exceedingly painful to contemplate. Nevertheless the Committee cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will."

The issue on which the Cripps-Congress negotiations broke down was the scope and substance of the power to be transferred to a reconstituted Executive Council of the Viceroy, including matters pertaining to Defence. A distinguished foreign friend of India had counselled the Indian National Congress against pitching its demands too high during wartime: he was President Chiang Kai-shek of China. Maulana Azad was staying with Asaf Ali when President Chiang, accompanied by Madam Chiang, came on a visit to India early in February 1942. He met the Congress President in Delhi even though he was a guest of the British rulers of India. Maulana Azad recalls in his memoirs (*India Wins Freedom*) that when he and Jawaharlal Nehru called on the Generalissimo on 11th February 1942, he said "it was obvious that the British Government would have to shoulder the burden of the war. It would not be reasonable to expect that they would give a hundred per cent responsibility to Indians so long as hostilities continued."

Yet, in a letter of 10th April 1942, Maulana Azad as Congress President insisted on an interim set-up that would function like a Cabinet: "While we cannot accept the proposals you have made, we want to inform you that we are prepared to assume responsibility provided a truly national government is formed. We are prepared to put aside for the present all questions about the future, though as we have indicated, we hold definite views about it. But, in the present, the National Government must be a cabinet government with full power and must not merely be a continuation of the Viceroy's Executive Council." Cripps could not accept this demand, and the negotiations broke down. At a Press conference on 11th April 1942, Maulana Azad denied that the failure of the talks was due to Gandhiji's pacifist views: "I must clarify the position created by certain speculations in a section of the Press regarding Mahatma Gandhi's part in the discussions. The Mahatma's views as regards participation in any war are well known, and it would be entirely untrue to suggest that the Working Committee's decisions have in any way been influenced by those views."

The next Congress conclave was of the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. at Allahabad, from 27th April to 2nd May 1942. Rajaji was made to resign from the Working Committee because he had, without prior consultation with his colleagues, got the Madras Congress Legislature party to adopt resolutions<sup>1</sup> calling for negotiations with the Muslim League on the basis of self-determination, and for resumption of office by the Congress in Madras province in the situation created by the threat of Japanese aggression (there had been coastal bombing, and a Japanese landing was feared.)

What was more remarkable, the Congress did a 180-degree turn on the

## *World War II: Congress Negativism*

question of self-determination. The A.I.C.C. passed by 92 votes to 17 a non-official resolution given notice of by more than fifty requisitionists, and moved by Jagat Narayan Lal, which read: "The A.I.C.C. is of opinion that any proposal to disintegrate India by giving liberty to any component state or territorial unit to secede from the Indian Union or Federation will be highly detrimental to the best interests of the people of the different states and provinces and the country as a whole, and the Congress therefore cannot agree to any such proposal."

Before this resolution was introduced, the question was raised whether it did not run counter to the resolution adopted in April 1942 by the Congress Working Committee at Delhi--and already endorsed by the A.I.C.C. at the self-same session--which had ruled out 'compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will'. Maulana Azad, who was in the chair, gave the extraordinary ruling that in his opinion Jagat Narayan Lal's resolution in no way contradicted the position taken up by the Working Committee at Delhi. The Allahabad A.I.C.C. also rejected by 120 votes to 15 a resolution moved by Rajaji and seconded by K.Santhanam saying that since neutrality or passivity during an invasion was impossible, a national government should be formed by choosing the lesser evil and "acknowledging the Muslim League's claim for separation, should the same be persisted in when the time comes for framing a Constitution." This somersault within a month was characteristic of the ambivalence of the Congress with regard to Muslim separatism.

The meeting of the A.I.C.C. that opened at Allahabad on 27th April 1942 was notable not only for approving two resolutions on the demand for Pakistan that were diametrically opposed to each other, it marked a shift closer to Gandhiji's pacifist position in the zig-zag course of Congress policy towards the war.

Gandhiji did not go to Allahabad, but he sent his views in the form of a draft resolution, carried by Mira Behn, which said inter alia: "Japan's quarrel is not with India. She is warring against the British empire...If India were freed, her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan. The Congress is of opinion that if the British withdraw from India, India would be able to defend herself in the event of Japanese or any aggressor attacking India. The A.I.C.C. is therefore of opinion that the British should withdraw from India ...The question of majority and minority is a creation of the British Government and would disappear on their withdrawal...India does not stand in need of foreign military aid. India will attain her freedom through her non-violent strength and will retain it likewise." In a covering letter, Gandhiji informed Jawaharlal Nehru that Acharya Narendra Dev had seen the draft and liked it, and added: "If you do not like my resolution I really cannot insist. The time has come when each of us must choose his own course." The Allahabad A.I.C.C. eventually adopted an alternative resolution proposed by Nehru.

This resolution called for non-violent non-cooperation with the aggressor

in the event of an attack on India, "as the British Government has prevented the organisation of national defence by the people in any other way."

By the middle of 1942 Gandhiji had arrived at the decision, as he told American journalists in an interview on 6th June 1942, "to make this honest demand: 'For Heaven's sake leave India alone'." This was the origin of his Quit India call, to be backed by the sanction of a mass movement on non-violent lines. Gandhiji's principal colleagues were not convinced. He writes to Amrit Kaur on 15th June 1942: "Maulana left (Sevagram) this morning and Jawaharlal will leave for Bombay this evening...In one sentence, Maulana is not satisfied with my demand or the manner of enforcement; he needs time for thought. Jawaharlal not quite so dissatisfied as Maulana, but not quite convinced either. The Working Committee will meet in July."

During the Working Committee meeting at Wardha, Gandhiji writes to Jawaharlal Nehru on 13th July about Maulana Azad: "I find that the two of us have drifted apart. I do not understand him nor does he understand me. We are drifting apart on the Hindu-Muslim question as well as other questions. I have also a suspicion that Maulana Saheb does not entirely approve of the proposed action. No one is at fault. We have to face the facts. Therefore, I suggest that the Maulana should relinquish Presidentship but remain in the Committee, the Committee should elect an interim President and should proceed unitedly. This great struggle cannot be conducted properly without unity and without a President who comes forth with a hundred per cent cooperation. Please show this letter to Maulana Saheb." Azad fell into line and continued to serve as President.

The next day the Working Committee adopted a resolution which said that the solution of the communal tangle was made impossible by the presence of the foreign power. On the question of defending India against the Japanese threat the resolution would not go further than saying that the Congress was agreeable to the stationing of allied forces in the country "should they so desire, to ward off and resist Japanese or other aggression and to protect and help China...Nor does the Congress intend to jeopardise the defensive capacity of the Allied Powers."

Calling upon the British to quit India, the resolution said that, should the appeal fail, the Congress would be 'reluctantly compelled', in view of the deterioration in the situation and weakening of the will and power to resist aggression, to utilise its non-violent strength in a mass movement under Gandhiji's leadership.

The 'Gandhians' in the Working Committee readily agreed to the resolution for the reason which was sufficient for them that Gandhiji wished it. About these colleagues Maulana Azad writes in his memoirs: "Now when I am writing in 1957 and looking at events in retrospect, I cannot refrain from saying that a remarkable change took place in the attitude of some of his closest followers. Sardar Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Kripalani and Dr. Profulla Ghosh



had resigned from the Working Committee when Congress passed a resolution (at Poona in 1940) that it would support the war effort if the British declared India free. They openly declared that for them non-violence was a creed and even more important than Indian independence. When, however, India did become free in 1947, not one of them said that the Indian army should be disbanded. On the contrary they insisted that the Indian army should be partitioned and brought under the immediate control of the Government of India...I have always had the feeling that these colleagues and friends did not exercise their own minds on most political issues...I was not and I am not behind any of them in my regard and admiration for Gandhiji but I could not for a moment accept the position that we should follow him blindly."

While Jawaharlal Nehru, during discussions in the Congress Working Committee, did not follow Gandhiji as blindly as the shallow-minded acolytes, Nehru too surrendered his judgement when it came to the crunch. So did Maulana himself. And Asaf Ali. None of these three favoured direct action in the form of mass civil disobedience at that point of time when Britain was in grave peril and when the Japanese were advancing towards India. But none of them openly unfurled the banner of revolt against Gandhiji's line as Rajaji had done under the dictate of intellectual integrity and moral conviction.

It was now the turn of C.Rajagopalachari to caution Gandhiji against creating anarchy. On 18th July, K.Santhanam and others joined C.R. in writing to Gandhiji from Madras to say of the 14th July 1942 'Quit India' resolution adopted by the Congress Working Committee at Wardha: "It is unnatural for any government to withdraw without a simultaneous replacement by another." They urged that continuity must be assured, and the Congress and the Muslim League should evolve a joint plan for a provisional government: "Even if we imagine that the British could ever under moral compulsion be made to withdraw unconditionally, we are convinced the chaos that would follow under existing conditions would not permit within any reasonable time the formation of a provisional government such as you contemplate." The signatories concluded by saying that the Working Committee's demand if complied with would result in anarchy, or if refused, in "widespread self-inflicted suffering."

The warning was not heeded. The A.I.C.C., meeting at Bombay in August, adopted with some important modifications the Working Committee's Wardha resolution.

Even after the adoption of the Congress Working Committee's 'Quit India' resolution of 14th July at Wardha, Asaf Ali did not give up his effort to dissuade Gandhiji from the course of action on which he was set. Asaf Ali says in a postscript to his letter of 26th July 1942 to Gandhiji: "Your statements about (1) no negotiation, (2) disbanding of Indian troops, (3) no party to whom power can be transferred, and (4) persuading Japan to cease war with China and not to attack India--despite Maulana and Jawahar's modifications and explanations--have been fixed upon by Government's propagandists for prejudicing

American and Chinese observers. Of course, it is for you to consider how this should be counteracted. Counteracted, in my opinion, it should be."

In his address to the Bombay A.I.C.C. in Hindi, Gandhiji told Government servants, soldiers and students what he would like them to do. Government servants should follow in the footsteps of Ranade and declare their allegiance to the Congress. They should say: "Though I serve the Government for my livelihood, I am not going to obey these secret circulars or to employ underhand methods." Gandhiji said that soldiers too were covered by the present programme: "I do not ask them just now to resign their posts and leave the army. Say: 'We will obey your just orders, but will refuse to fire on our own people.'" He told the students: "For the present, till the time I frame a programme for the struggle, tell the professors you belong to the Congress."

Speaking in English, Gandhiji addressed the world through the foreign correspondents present: "Do the British get from India all they want? What they get today is from the India which they hold in bondage. Think what difference it would make if India was to participate as a free ally...Englishmen did not die in Malaya or on the soil of Burma. Where shall I go and where shall I take the forty crores of India?"

The resolution finally adopted by the A.I.C.C. at Bombay on 8th August 1942 pledged resistance against aggression with armed as well as non-violent means--an unambiguous declaration which made Asaf Ali happy: "For the first time since the outbreak of the war, I could lay my hand on my heart and say, 'This is an aim anybody should be proud to lay down his life for.' Our earlier resolutions had somehow left in me a sense of inadequacy."

The resolution conveyed to the Russian and Chinese people the A.I.C.C.'s high appreciation of their heroism, and said: "On the declaration of India's independence, a provisional government will be formed by the cooperation of the principal parties and groups in the country... Its primary function must be to defend India and resist aggression with all the armed as well as the non-violent forces at its command, together with the Allied Powers. The provisional government will evolve a scheme for a Constituent Assembly and will prepare a federal constitution with residuary powers in autonomous units." The resolution backed the demand with the sanction of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale. Such a struggle must inevitably be under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Committee requests him to take the load and guide the nation on the steps to be taken."

Gandhiji did not formally launch a movement: he had hoped to have a dialogue with the Viceroy. But he was, along with all important Congress leaders, arrested in the early hours of 9th August 1942.

## **Journey to Ahmadnagar**

*The circumstances in which the British authorities in India decided to hold the*

members of the Congress Working Committee in detention at Ahmadnagar Fort in Maharashtra (then part of Bombay province) are narrated by Lt.Gen.G.N. Mulesworth--at that time D.C.G.S. (O) at GHQ, New Delhi--in his *Curfew on Olympus*.

He recalls that Attock in northern Punjab was initially suggested to the Viceroy. But the town, overlooking the confluence of the Kabul and Indus rivers, was malarious, extremely hot in summer and very cold in winter. Another aspect, he says, "was that it is situated in an area where the population is mainly Muslim, while the Congress leaders were Hindus." He objected on the grounds of danger to the detenus from the local population, and of health.

Gen. Mulesworth goes on to say: "I remembered my early sojourn in Ahmadnagar, in the Deccan. The climate there is temperate all the year round and there is no malaria. The old Mogul fort had high masonry walls, surrounded on three sides by a deep, broad, dry moat. It could be entered only by a single main gate reached by a bridge (which had once been a draw-bridge) over the moat. After the gate was a guard-house and over this, on the wall were several apartments once occupied by members of the Afghan royal family who had been interned during the middle of the 19th century. Within the walls was a large grassed open space. I recommended it on grounds of easy access from Bombay, security and health. The proposal was accepted."

The fort belongs to the period of the Nizamshahis, one of the Deccan kingdoms that tried to be independent of the central power in Delhi. The fort was initially built of mud, in 1490, by Ahmed Nizam Shah and later in stone by Hussain Nizam Shah in the middle of the 16th century. Sultana Chand Bidi of Ahmadnagar fought the Mughal prince Murad in 1596 and defeated him. In 1759 the fort was captured by the Marathas. It passed under British control in 1803 following an attack by General Wellesley.

Reflecting on the historical associations of the fort, Asaf ali writes in his Prison Diary:

29th September 1942. Aurangzeb's grave is scarcely 50 miles from here. And I often say to myself: "And the Mughal empire was buried with him." It is a strange coincidence that, sitting in this fortress-prison of Ahmadnagar, we are witnessing the guttering of the British power's candle down its socket. The Union Jack is daily hoisted on the bastion which faces us, and a frayed one was changed two days ago. I say to myself: "This is the last of it. It cannot float in India after this war."

The barrack rooms (on one side of a quadrangle) in which the Congress Working Committee members were held now house some of the records of the Indian Army's Armoured Corps which has its Centre and School at Ahmadnagar. The Visitors' Book maintained by the present tenants of the historic site contains interesting entries. Asaf Ali did not revisit the scene, but Jawaharlal Nehru did twice. On his first visit as Prime Minister, on 1st May 1953, he merely signed the Visitors' Book. On a subsequent visit, on 15th May 1961, he wrote:

"This is my third visit to this fort. The first visit was the longest--when we were detained here for nearly three years--1942-45. The next time I came in May 1953 just to see how this place looked like, and to revive old memories. And now, eight years later, I come again and the past comes up before--the quiet, uneventful past when we lived here and could only hear very distantly the far-off drums of the Great World War that was going on then."

Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit came on 22nd March 1964:

"This is my first visit to the fort. For me it is, in every sense of the word, a place of pilgrimage bringing all the sense of uplift that comes through contact and sights of such a place. The years 1942-45 have already receded into the shadows of the past, but their impact will remain for centuries to come." Soon afterwards, following her brother's death, she flew over Ahmadnagar in a Dakota aircraft of the Indian Air Force to release some of Jawaharlal Nehru's ashes from a nylon sieve. India's first Prime Minister had expressed the desire, in his will, that his ashes should be scattered extensively over the mountains and plains of the country.

The story of the journey of the Congress leaders from Bombay, through Poona, to Ahmadnagar, the pattern of their life in the fort prison, their interaction which revealed differences but in some cases led to better mutual understanding, is told vividly in the extracts that follow from the Prison Diary maintained by Asaf Ali:

*31st August 1942:* The 9th of this month was in every sense a fateful day for India.

I was far from well when I left Delhi on the 3rd, and although Rene was to have accompanied me, on confirmation of the rumour that the members of the Working Committee would not be allowed to return home I asked her to stay behind in Delhi to make such domestic adjustments as might be called for in case she too was pounced upon.

Was ill on the train, and Kitty<sup>2</sup> looked after both myself and B.N. Rao. From the moment I arrived in Bombay, I was in the hands of doctors: Nari<sup>3</sup> my host, was taking no chance.

Rene joined me on the 6th, but a day earlier she and Khanna<sup>4</sup> managed to send word from Delhi that the Government had finally issued orders for our arrest and detention in a special concentration camp--in a fort. It is a matter for no little gratification that even the most secret dealings of the Government reach us without any ado. We had it from the same source that the confidential correspondence between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State contained suggestions about deporting Gandhiji to Uganda, but finally the proposal was dropped.

But none of us gave full credence to this information, having regard to the general nature of rumours. Moreover, in view of the entire tenor of our resolution, and the scrupulously clean procedure which Gandhiji always employs and which he fully intended to employ this time before, if at all,

he should be driven to launch a struggle, we could not dream of any precipitate action on the part of the Government. The resolution was Jawaharlal Nehru's draft, and I must say that it was nobly conceived and effectively expressed. As Rene put it when she joined me in Bombay, this resolution was the first effort in the world to define what the war and peace aims should be.

At about 11 at night, after the A.I.C.C. meeting which concluded late in the evening of the 8th, we were at the dinner table at Nari's (I was still on liquids and sops) when there was a telephone call. Nari was informed by a friend that arrest was imminent. Nari told us that it was about Maulana's arrest. Perhaps he thought that the news would disturb Rene. It was very considerate of him but he did not know how much more Rene was prepared for. I made light of the rumour, pointing out that Maulana's speech, like the resolution, was a call for negotiation.

Next morning (the 9th) at about 5.30, Nari knocked and said "Are you awake? They have come to fetch you and me." Rene and I were up in a moment. I took 20 to 30 minutes washing and getting ready, and packing up for the journey. They said that we were going by a special train in the direction of Poona.

Rene insisted on accompanying me to the railway station. We found the place strangely quiet and elaborately guarded. The cars in which we were--Nari in one, and Rene and I with a police officer in the other--were stopped, and were allowed to enter the station yard only after our escorts showed their credentials. On reaching the platform I caught sight of Akka in the midst of a few coolies and many policemen, ordering them about to put her baggage in the train. She greeted us in her usual affectionate but rather preoccupied manner. Then I caught sight of Dhiru<sup>5</sup>, who told me that Maulana was in the coach opposite. So I walked in.

I found Maulana in high spirits. In a bantering tone he greeted me with, "So you have come!" When Mahmud was led in, Maulana broke into another laugh. Jawahar, Shankar Rao and Kripalani came in, too, and all of us kept Maulana company in his mirthfulness. I thought it was due to the sudden cessation of prolonged tension. We felt for the moment as if a load of cares was off our minds.

A number of police and military officers were conspicuous on the platform and inside the train. After waiting for an hour for Pant, the special started without him, at about 7. I cast a last glance at Rene. After accompanying me to my compartment and having a word with Maulana, she had been standing on the platform along with Dhiru, beyond the cordon the police had drawn in front of the train. I don't believe the police arrangements when the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief or the the Governors travel about in India are more elaborate. What poor prisoners they make in the midst of their artificial pomp and glory. And what real glory, judged by

popular estimation, appeared to attend those who were being led captive to their Bastille--not to mention Gandhiji who, it was understood, would be detained at Poona to be lodged in the Aga Khan's palace.

We had hardly moved out of the station when I was rudely awakened from the reverie into which Rene's distant goodbye had thrown me. Her face was livid with suppressed anger, and heaven knows with what rapid trains of thought or gusts of emotion--not personal only, although she had as much reason as I had to wonder whether this would not be a goodbye for good. Her last look--glancing, half averted, and full of uncertainty--had left me in a brown study.

The cause of the rude awakening was a loud quarrel in the next cabin. The D.I.G. had committed the silly indiscretion of addressing Yusuf Meherally as 'my boy'. Yusuf was piqued, and shouted in a shrill voice: "Do you know whom you are talking to? I am the Mayor of Bombay." A truce was effected by the intervention of the silver-tongued Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Meanwhile we were informed that breakfast was ready in the Restaurant Car.

It was great fun indeed as we walked through the corridor train and sat down in fours, to regale ourselves with the dainties provided by the Bombay Government whose involuntary guests we were. Jawahar, Maulana, Sardar and Mahmud occupied the left-hand top table; Akka, myself, Mahadev Desai and Mirabehn (Miss Slade) sat at the parallel right-hand top table. (These could also be called the bottom tables. But as we sat facing the direction of our movement, I have preferred to call them the top tables. After all, terms are only relative.) The others, including the Bombay worthies --Kher and all -- were at the rest of the tables. Each ordered what he desired. Some had eggs, poached, fried or boiled; some had toast with coffee or tea, but the majority had only fruits and milk. I confined myself to tea.

Poor dear Mahadev! Who could have imagined that he was having his last meal with us. He died on the 15th. Mahadev had been suffering from high blood pressure, and according to the press report he died of heart failure. Nearly two-thirds of Gandhiji's needs, both physical, and in writing for and running the journals, were looked after by Mahadev. He was not a mere amanuensis or private secretary to Gandhiji, but almost his second self in many ways. His death is bound to have been felt as a stunning blow, but Gandhiji is great enough not to crumple up. But Gandhiji is, I fear, likely to be affected in a manner unsuspected by many of us. His mind is firmly rooted in the mystical reality (contradictory terms) which he calls the divine will. I wonder if in Mahadev's death he will read a message that his own multifarious activities, which depended so much on Mahadev, should be terminated. I would give anything to know the workings of his mind after this blow.

As we passed station after station we found the platforms guarded by the police, with not even Railway staff or porters on the platforms. Occasionally we caught sight of some Railway officials, in their black coats, stealthily peering from behind trellised screens or the glasspanes of office doors. We had seen only a few early risers on the roads of Bombay's suburbs, but the fields through which we now passed were dotted with unsuspecting toilers who must have grown indifferent to passing trains. The scenery of the ghats was superb, as it always is during the rains. Sometimes the rain would beat a familiar tune on the window panes. We passed through tunnels as we neared Poona. Suddenly someone came along to tell us that Mahatma Gandhi would be getting off at the next halt--a few miles this side of Poona-- and those of us who desired to do so might go and see him. Maulana, Jawahar and others walked down to Gandhiji's compartment and had a chat with him. I did not feel like going there and crowding the small compartment. All the visitors were required to return to their seats before the train reached the next station. Our compartment was locked off from the rest.

When the train halted, we found that elaborate arrangements had been made. Since neither Railway staff nor porters were allowed on the platform, the luggage of Gandhiji's party and of the others who detrained there was carried by constables. As Gandhiji, Mrs. Naidu, Mauldev Desai, Mirabeen and Manibehn<sup>6</sup> walked past our compartment, some of them waved to us.

A few of us had an uncomfortable feeling that we might not see Gandhiji again: he might find himself in a situation during his detention that might lead to his final fast. He had said more than once during discussions in the Working Committee that although he realised that all of us were strongly opposed to his undertaking a fast unto death, he might be constrained to do so. In fact, during his last talk with Maulana and Jawahar on the train, he said that if he were not allowed to carry on his work, he would not tolerate the paralysing restraint. Jawahar was astonished that Gandhiji should expect such latitude under the then circumstances. Surely they would not detain and intern him, only to let him 'do his work' which could mean conducting a civil disobedience campaign!

I at any rate felt that this might be the last time I was seeing the great man. I was only mechanically observing what was happening. My deeper thoughts were far away, reviewing the events of the past quarter century and looking many scores of years ahead, when history was likely to be viewed in proper perspective. The scene before me was unspectacular: a puny, sparsely clad old man accompanied among others by three women (one of them a widely known poet and another an Englishwoman wearing coarse Indian homespun). Yet it stirred in my mind memories of Herod, Pilate, the Grand Priest of the Jews, Christ and the Cross, mixed up with

pictures which future historians might draw in a sequence of parallelism. In a few minutes the three cars carrying Gandhiji and the others set off to take them into what the British rulers of India had planned to be the region of oblivion. Poor mortals! History teems with examples of such foredoomed schemes. The great Pharaoh dealt with Moses in similar fashion. Confident of his might, he chased the old patriarch beyond the borders of his empire. And yet, for over five thousand years Moses has lived in all his glory far beyond the extreme boundary of Pharaoh's once mighty empire. The great Augustus's governor, in another land, acted similarly towards a Jewish carpenter's son who had dared to preach the doctrine of revivifying revolt against the established order of earthly might and spiritual decay. And Augustus lived to hear the doctrine of the crucified Jew preached within the precincts of the Capitol. The Roman and Byzantine empires have gone up in smoke, but the message of the Sermon on the Mount has re-echoed through the corridors of time.

After a few minutes the detained contingent of Bombay detenus were also led out. And then we resumed the journey to our unknown destination. Of course it turned out to be the fort where, according to the report received from Delhi on the 6th August, we were to be interned. In fact, this information--described by Rene and by Jugal Kishore Khanna as straight out of the horse's mouth--turned out to be accurate down to the particular that while the internal arrangements of our detention were to be entrusted to civil authorities, the responsibility for keeping us sealed off from the outside world would rest with the military. Our informant had seen the secret official communication signed by Maxwell.

*1st September 1942:* The news received so far does not show any improvement in the war situation from the anti-Axis point of view. The situation within India, as can be judged even from the smoothed and ironed government communiques and the censored news agency reports, is far from normal.

Our position has received ocular proof. We had maintained that once the imagination of the people was fired with genuine enthusiasm, their potential strength would be converted into unlimited determination to defend their new-born freedom. If in spite of the fact that we did not launch any movement (the time was not yet, the zero hour had not struck), and in spite of our instructions that in no case was any Congressman to deviate from non-violence, the people's anger has run into violent channels, is it not simple logic that if their representatives had assumed power in a country declared and recognised as free, their organised strength would have meant India's war potential raised a hundredfold? But the British rulers would not see it.

*2nd September 1942 :* News is sparse, but whatever is available is enough to indicate that the upsurge of indignation in the country after our arrest



was uncontrollable. I was moved to the very depth of my being when I learnt last night that Delhi was in the grip of an upheaval of anger for several days. Hell, it seems, was let loose almost at the start, when the police shot down 12 demonstrators and injured God knows how many. And this form of ruthlessness was displayed in a hundred different places in the country. Is it a wonder that the result was counter-violence by the people? It is true that, mad with gratuitously provoked fury, the mob too has committed regrettable excesses. But did the Government expect anything else? Did they think that an attack on peaceful protesters would produce a mammoth demonstration of love and affection for them and for their henchmen? Did they not know that by putting a match to the powder magazine of public resentment, and by shutting up precisely those persons who constituted a veritable fire-brigade, they would sabotage the very war effort they were so concerned about?

### **Random Jottings : VIP Gardeners**

*6th September 1942* : Another Sunday has dawned. I heard a faint tolling of the church bells this morning. After many days of constant clouds and rain--fitful drizzle or moderate patter--it is a clear and slightly crisp morning. It appears that the spell of rainy weather is drawing to a close, because the spiders have started weaving their beautiful webs, mostly in places which are likely to yield easy prey.

Is not the entire web of this wondrous universe analogous to the spider's parlour? A profound intelligence somewhere at the centre of the universe has woven a fascinating web all round itself, and it lies there waiting for the prey called life. Every time the fly of life falls into the finely spun threads of the web, it struggles and upsets the carefully arranged trap. And although it fails to escape from the wily and ruthless spider, it disarranges at least a small sector of the beautiful, skilfully woven web. Wherever life touches the so-called eternal laws of the universe, it imposes its own laws upon their texture. But I often wonder where all this is leading life. In human beings, the fly of my parable has reached its utmost achievement--memory, intelligence and skilful labour, utilising all the resources of nature. But to what end? We are born and know not for what purpose, and we go on, like all the forms into which life has found lodgement, ceaselessly pursuing certain inevitable functions, constantly sublimating the primary urges of self-preservation and self-propagation, obeying or trying to revolt against the common dictates of being. In the course of our brief voyage through this infinitesimal stretch of being, we either passively follow or actively oppose the line of least resistance, and often regard the dust which the incessant turn of the wheel raises as part of our own achievement. Poor fools! How many of the human race have wondered,

and after the deepest consideration cried in vain, 'Whither?' I am frequently caught in the storm of these ideas. I try to invest my will with a direction and purpose. I do believe that will is the sole instrument of the perfection which Plato regarded as the goal of being. But is not this very instrument rather poorly fashioned? And what colossal suffering it imposes on its wielder if the latter seeks to direct its course against the line of least resistance!

Just this minute Maulana came in. We started discussing this very question. How easily he covers the ground of the eternal controversy. He likes playing with opposite ideas. Maulana does not seem to recognise freedom of will in the last analysis. He acknowledges that the world of action would be reduced to nonsense without freedom of will. But his mind appears to be greatly influenced by the philosophical discussion conducted for centuries by Muslim thinkers, who have at the end of the subtlest of arguments conceded the defeat of freedom. The pot has no option but to yield to the potter's touch and assume the shape intended. In fact, it is wrong to say 'assume', for it has not the freedom even to subordinate its will voluntarily to the superior will. Heavens! No, I refuse to be so irredeemably mortgaged to stiff and unrelenting determinism.

*7th September 1942* : It is a bright and clear morning after weeks. There is a patch of emerald green grass, not bigger than a goodsized carpet, just in front of my window, with some wild weeds which display tiny flowers of bright yellow, blue and purple, at natural and therefore uncertain intervals. Drops of dew form on the tips of the flowers during the night, and the first rays of dawn discover these jewels and turn the searchlight full on them. At some angle or the other these perfect globules of the liquescent element distilled by mysterious processes catch the reflection of the sun in all its glory. For the nonce, they can boast of holding captive the total magnificence of the heavenly orb.

As I looked out of my window this morning, the bed of grass presented a fascinating sight. The dew drops were aglow with sunshine, and every gentle breath of air made their iridescence quiver in rhythmic harmony with nature's silent orchestra. All life is but a variation in the course of this symphony. If nature has pedalled softly here this morning, in other improvisations it varies the pitch and timbre of its notes. And in the sphere of human life it often reaches the crescendo.

Is there the meanest of human beings who does not catch the total reflection of the sublime sun of the universal intelligence at least for one fleeting moment in the whole of his existence? Maybe that some dew drops out of the myriads which quiver on the edges of leaves and flowers remain so completely shaded by foliage that they totally escape the passage of the sun's rays. Similarly there may be some human beings who are so completely wrapped up in the self-concentrated importance and urgency of

their ego that they escape the ubiquitous effulgence.

I have for about thirty years now entertained the notion that this universe is instinct with a pervasive and profound intelligence. All visible objects and immaterial concepts derive from it. Let us call it the sun of intelligence or of life. It shines without remission. All things and persons get a share of the sunshine as, in the course of their voyage through existence, their being turns some of its reflective facets to the central orb. A life is the momentary glow of the eternal light. The object passes out of the line of the ray, after a transitory participation in the carnival of brilliance. The light, however, endures for ever.

*12th October 1942:* During the India debate in the commons, Amery & Co. have maintained their old ground: the Congress is recalcitrant, there is no communal unity, and we the British must continue to be there in the interest of India itself and of the United Nations.

But surely John Bull's sway cannot last for ever, I reckon the average age of empires at 250 years. And I feel that the British empire is in the throes of dissolution, the boast of the imperialists notwithstanding. The sap has gone dry, though the desiccated trunk and brittle branches are still there. This war may prove the storm which uproots old trees. The uprooted tree may, even when it has fallen, occupy much ground until it is hacked to pieces and disposed of. Some of the timber may go to the making of doors and furniture, and much more may be cast into the fireplace. That has been the end of the best of them.

*13th October 1942 :* If there is to be a peaceful world, colonial possessions and exploitation in any shape or form must be ruled out. So long as countries crave for privileged positions, the arbitrament of the sword cannot be avoided. In history we find the alternating processes of the aggrandisement and consolidation of empires and great kingdoms, and their fragmentation. At the bottom are the have-nots, who aid and abet or just acquiesce in both the processes. Conquerors and damagogues thrive on the discontent of the have-nots, and they also perish in its flames.

The disinherited of the world must come into their own if a higher order of civilization is to be established. We have advanced considerably from the cave stage of human existence. We have also passed part of the way through the region of superstition and the demoralising fear of the unknown. But, alas, the majority of the leaders of men are learned cowards, whose nerves fail them and instead of leading mankind to higher achievement, they are led by the ignorant and fanatical among their tribes and groups. They pander to the prejudices of their people, and in the process dig deep and dark graves for the coming generations. There have been great, courageous and clear thinkers among various peoples of the earth, but for want of general enlightenment they have failed to achieve the success their teaching deserved. The crafty and selfish men of each age

have smothered general enlightenment.

But today, when one man can speak to the whole world, when the whole world can go into a session to deliberate--such is the power of the Radio--it would be odd if the wise among men could not be heard, and the consensus of world opinion not change from narrow selfishness to the achievement of a higher civilization.

After discussing the unwisdom of Aurangzeb's reversal of Akbar's wise and tolerant policies, a reversal which resulted in conflict between the Mughal power and Marathas and the eventual establishment of European ascendancy, Asaf Ali writes in the Prison Diary:

*17th October 1942:* "This, however, is but the superficial aspect. The true and far-reaching causes of the dissolution of empires and kingdoms are deeper. The ultimate source of all governmental authority resides in the goodwill and welfare of the masses of people. While passing through India's villages, I have often said to myself: "And none, for thousands of years, neither Hindu nor Muslim nor any other ruler so far, has attempted to improve the condition of these toilers of the soil living in squalid and dingy huts." How can governments, whether foreign or indigenous, endure while million upon million of human beings drag out a miserable existence from year's end to year's end, starved and half nude?

Am I driving at a communistic structure of society as the ideal? I don't know how, in the final analysis, a just social order can be avoided. Indeed there is no reason why it should be avoided, except in such of its aspects as experience elsewhere (as in Russia) has proved to be costly in human life and in avoidable suffering because of too precipitate or ruthless a process of change, or the uprooting of certain institutions like religion deeply embedded and hallowed in the memory of men and women.

*23rd October 1942:* Gardening has become an absorbing pastime for Jawahar and myself now. He has been digging pits and beds for a fortnight--strenuous exercise--and I have, on account of some trouble with my right elbow, confined myself to lighter tasks. We started sowing three or four days ago.

All the digging and laying out of beds, making a nursery in soap boxes, sending for garden soil and manure (for here it is all gravel and rubble, with just an interlarding of earth here and there) and the various ancillary operations took us nearly three weeks. Only then could we get going with the sowing of seeds. This place has plenty of weeds and some colourful wild flowers. Our plans, if successful, will transform it into a smiling and glowing garden.

*24th October 1942:* We had the privilege of witnessing the first appearance of the seedlings yesterday. Patel noticed it first, and then Jawaharlal shouted the glad tidings to me, and I felt like a child on securing his first toy.

*29th October 1942.* We have spent a busy couple of days--Jawahar and I, and lately also Patel and some other colleagues--sowing seeds, digging more beds, preparing bough-pots, and today putting in a host of seedlings sent by the District Magistrate to please Jawaharlal Nehru.

Now the further labour of weeding, nursing, pruning and trimming and training will be added. Gardening is a cooperative endeavour, although singly too something can be done within a limited area. No garden can spring up without collective labour, care and constant tending. In life, too, it is the same. Some prepare the ground and others sow seeds. And, often, yet others reap the harvest. You can rear and raise neither a harvest nor a garden all in a day.

Moreover, skill and labour alone will not do. Much will depend on the things belonging to the earth: the soil, the manure, and air, water and sunshine. As in human life, all these elements are essential for both individual and collective growth. The parable of the sower and the parable of the vineyard came so naturally to Christ, who observed the commonest things of life and brought out their profound meaning.

*6th November 1942.* Now that I think of it, one of the reasons for my missing to put anything into this diary for a full week was the excitement of the growing garden. Morning glory began to flower a week ago, beginning almost from the bottom of the creepers. And the colours these creepers are putting out are really glorious, ranging from deep indigo to spotted white, with various shades of purple and orange.

I spend quite a bit of my time, and so do the others, particularly Patel, Jawaharlal and even Maulana, in visiting and examining each seedling and each flower and discussing and appraising them--this being the main diversion in an otherwise boring atmosphere of dullness, monotony and suppressed irritation.

*29th December 1942:* Yesterday the newspapers and the day before yesterday the Radio (as privately conveyed to us) announced the sudden death of Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan. It was shocking news. And what a tragically happy end! He died of heart failure soon after entertaining his guests at the wedding feast which wound up three marriages--of two of his sons, and of a daughter. He was buried with military honours after his body had lain in state under the very *shamiana* erected for the reception. As the Urdu verse says, "Time carries a wine cup in hand, and a corpse on the back."

I felt we should send a message of condolence by wire, in spite of the stupid restrictions imposed on our correspondence, and told Maulana so. Jawahar was present, and he too agreed that it was due. Yesterday a telegraphic message from Maulana, Jawahar and myself was written out by Jawahar and handed in for transmission. It has gone by post to the Bombay Government today!

I knew Sikandar since 1909. I first met him in India House at Highgate, London, where he used to go now and again, and later at public functions in London. We met again in India in the course of our public activities, and had numerous occasions in recent years for informal talks at my own house and at his place, with a view to finding a solution to the communal and national tangles.

About two years ago he came to my house, met Maulana and after a long talk we came to a broad agreement. I drafted the formula, and he himself suggested an amendment which made it flexible enough for possible adjustments. Unfortunately Jinnah ruled it out at the ensuing meeting of the League Council at Bombay. But Sikandar was not the man to say die. We had subsequent occasions to consider the problem further.

I doubt whether the Punjab can find one like Sikandar for a long time. And his absence will be felt keenly in other quarters too. A man of great personal charm, robust common sense and infinite tact, Sikandar was, I think, a statesman as compared with Jinnah the politician, though Jinnah is incomparably more astute and unbending. The Punjab will henceforth, I fear, become a hotbed of intrigue for power.

*31st December 1942:* The old year is gasping and the new is about to be delivered. Death and birth, birth and death seem to move in a circle--nay, in a spiral.

*30th March 1943:* Alas! Poor Satyamurthi died two days ago. I was shocked. He was a sincere friend and such a fine man. His death was accelerated by the last incarceration.

So this is the end of his restless and eager soul. Death is the most certain fact of life. Who can escape it? And yet life resists it, even in the midst of pain. What makes us want to live?

*29th May 1943:* Five days ago came the stunning news of Allah Bux's tragic end. He was only 45. The personal aspect of so promising a career being so prematurely cut short was shocking enough. But more than that, if there is a political motive behind the killing, it is a disastrous development in politics.

Allah Bux was against the Pakistan idea for reasons which he held to be of vital importance to the well being of Indian Muslims. But he was prepared to examine any scheme with an open mind. I think I knew his ideas as intimately as anybody, perhaps a little more, for he was most frank with me. He had a clear mind and was not swayed by emotions and sentiments. If this turns out to be a political vendetta, as suspected by some, it would be a horrible omen for the future. If political opinion, honestly entertained and ventilated, is to be wiped out in this fashion, farewell to democracy.

Poor Allah Bux! Only last year, about this time, he brought his wife to

Delhi and they came to our house. Maulana was there too. And he said to his wife: "No purdah with these friends." Then he revisited Delhi in connection with the Sukkur Barrage dispute. I found him rather badly shaken by the Hur outrages. He was facing the situation bravely, but I felt that he found it full of peril. Who could tell how he would end up? There is always an incalculable factor in human destiny.

*21st September 1943:* Poor dear Azad is dead. He had been ailing from high blood pressure and attacks of paralysis. When I met him last, in 1941, he was confined to his bedroom.

M.K.Azad was one of the three or four of our old group of the Lincoln's Inn days left alive. A loyal and affectionate friend, he went up to Delhi with Jack Davar to defend me in 1918 when I was indicted under the Defence of India Act of those days, and eventually acquitted.

I have mourned the loss of so many friends that I am no longer capable of expressing all that I feel. Every death is now a reminder that the final step is drawing nearer and nearer, and one must reconcile oneself to the closing scene. "Return to thy God willingly", says the Qoran. What else is there for poor, transient human beings born without their consent and dying without knowing when, where and how: "We are born in another's pain and perish in our own."

*8th December 1943.* It was with a shock of surprise this morning that I heard Maulana say, "It is Id today." I had no idea that it was Bakr Id.

Time in a prison stands immovable in its majesty, and only an effort of will can divide it into recognisable portions of human measurement. All the other animals count their time (if count they can) by sunrise and sunset, and by an instinctive recognition of the mating time. Otherwise Time is the eternal silence that it was and shall ever be.

*13th March 1944:* The rulers of the princely States in India have learnt by experience that British democracy has so far proved a good friend to their autocracy and can be relied upon, for selfish reasons, to support them. Hence their reliance on treaty rights and hence the British assurance of 'respecting treaties'. As against that, the princes have been alarmed by the growth of representative government in the British Indian provinces, and feel unsafe with all the radical talk about a 'revolutionary outlook'.

I believe that if a Union of predominantly Hindu provinces were agreed upon and the dissident Muslim provinces stayed out of it, many Hindu states will would like to come into the Union, but only if they see a safe future for themselves. Jawaharlal's talk of precipitating revolutionary changes in the social structure-is liable to deter them.

*11th May 1944 :* So I begin the 57th year of my existence on this planet, having lived more than half a century without knowing the why and whence or the whither of existence. No mortal has been able to find

satisfactory answers to these questions. And yet while this body lasts, it appears so real.

I can live in my imagination all the 56 years that I have lived. And most of the time we do little else but live, over and over again, the life we have lived.

*20th July 1944:* Life here has become monotonous and stagnant. Even jokes and comments have become depressingly stale. When human beings are imprisoned together for a long time they cannot help jarring on one another, particularly if they are ill assorted temperamentally and by cultural background. It is by an effort that one keeps smiling.

Maulana and Jawahar are exceptions. Mahmud and I have become friendlier, and I find Pattabhi, too, an agreeable person. Pant and I have long walks and talks together. And the others are all good men in their own way. But everything has become stale in this place, where we have been rotting as in a graveyard.

*9th August 1944:* Full two years have gone by, and the whole world, India, Rene and myself have passed through a whole age of events and experiences.

The war has entered its decisive phase. The Russian armies are fast closing in upon German occupied territory, the Anglo- American forces that landed in Normandy are making progress, and in Italy the battle is raging beyond Rome, near Florence. Japan is still sprawling over a good half of China, and in Indonesia, Malaya and Burma. But the Japanese invasion across the Assam frontier, in the Imphal sector, has been beaten back.

I am anxiously awaiting news about Rene. As for myself I am an older, perhaps wiser but certainly a lonely being.

*26th September 1944:* Lately I have been reading a fair amount-- both classical and scientific literature, and light stuff. This is thanks to Jawaharlal, who is well supplied with the latest books and periodicals. He reads an enormous amount.

My latest have been Einstein & Infeld's 'History of Physics', 'Loom of Language' by Hogben & Bodmers, and their 'Interglossa'. I can't help thinking that no one who wants to understand the history of humanity's inter-relationship should miss the 'Loom'. It is a liberal education in itself. While going through an abridged version of the Bhagavat Puran and Mahabharat along with the original verses in Sanskrit, I was amazed to find that I could read and follow the Sanskrit with the help of the translation.

### **Against Vegetating In Prison**

*9th August 1943:* So this is the first day of the second year of our detention.

A review of Congress politics of the last 23 years under Gandhiji presents



a depressing picture, despite some brilliant patches. Gandhian politics is claimed to have produced a deep and wide awakening and political consciousness. I am convinced (and C.R. agreed with me when we talked about it last) that this would have come about in any case if Das's and Motilal's policy had been followed constructively all along. Had Reading's offer of provincial autonomy to Das been accepted, and not rejected by Gandhiji, it would have ripened into a largely self-governing central government, and the Congress-League conflict might have been avoided.

Even during this war, if Cripps's offer had been accepted, it would for certain have ripened into complete independence after the war.

There was a glimmer of hope in March this year when the Bombay meeting of non-party leaders including C.R. and Bhulabhai Desai, who had seen Gandhiji during his fast, resolved that both Congress and Government should revise their policies. They wanted some of the leaders to be allowed to see Gandhiji towards the achievement of this end. But the Government remained adamant.

I have differed from Gandhiji and I have differed from those who think that India can be revolutionised overnight. Gandhiji's is a religious outlook which cannot prevail over practical life. And the idealists are enthusiasts who are incapable of taking a balanced view of realities.

I held with C.R. Das in 1922-23 that Gandhiji threw away a splendid chance when provincial autonomy was offered. The Swaraj Party came into existence, and I threw myself heart and soul into it. I have remained a Swarajist all the time, that is, a believer in the parliamentary programme.

Asaf Ali explains what he means by the parliamentary programme, in a subsequent diary entry during August 1944. Famine and epidemics had taken a massive toll of life in Bengal, then ruled by a coalition led by non-Congress Muslims supported by European members of the Bengal Provincial Assembly. The reference to Air Raid Precautions is in the context of the then anticipated attack on India by Japanese forces. Asaf Ali writes:

It is a pity that the Congress leadership has yet to develop a realistic political outlook. If you say 'Try the parliamentary method', you are met with the rejoinder, 'Who has won freedom by parliamentary methods?' They do not appreciate that the parliamentary method goes much further than mere oratory in legislatures. You formulate demands, convince and carry electorates with you, and the outcome will finally rest on the pressure consciously exerted by the taxpayer--and even a poor man who buys a pie worth of salt pays his share of tax. But that apart, who has won freedom by Satyagraha either?

The final sanction is the will of the people to be free. Undoubtedly the Congress has promoted this will among large sections of the people, and the willingness to suffer has been fostered by Gandhiji's Satyagraha. But

the occasion has to be right for the exercise of that will to suffer. In my opinion 1942 was a wrong occasion. The entire war period should have been devoted to parliamentary activity, with popular organisations such as the A.R.P. and associations for relief of sufferers from famine, flood and epidemics working hand in hand with and strengthening the popular governments. In the end would have come the reward--or otherwise a struggle. But Gandhiji and his group precipitated a crisis prematurely, and Jawaharlal simply abdicated his reason. And now we are in a quandary. A bad gambler's throw has produced this situation.

I am next to none in respecting Gandhiji for his saintly life. I admire him for his amazing constancy and strength of will, faith and self-confidence. I have even a sneaking affection for him, for his is a lovable nature. But his last movement was a desperate throw, and but for a sense of loyalty to the organisation I would have stood aside.

Gandhiji meant well, and expected that a compromise would follow the adoption of the Quit India resolution. But the War Government attacked the Congress organisation without seeking a settlement. And now they seem to have launched upon a policy of keeping the Congress in cold storage and encouraging the League and the Mahasabha. This will queer the pitch for post-war political developments.

I am tired of the see-saw of revolt and of constructive work which has gone on for 23 years, with the Congress now in and now out of the legislatures and the government. However much I respect and admire Gandhiji as a saint and a sage, I can no longer follow him in politics. This is my last act of loyalty to the party and the team. I must lead a personal and private life henceforth.

*28th January 1944:* In the life of nations, there are rare periods when it is possible for a few influential individuals to become men of destiny. In India, Gandhiji, Jawahar and Jinnah could have, at the outbreak of this war, united their forces to change India's destiny and bring about a revolution without strife of any kind. The opportunity was missed. It is difficult to blame anyone in particular. But, generally speaking, neither Gandhiji nor Jinnah had Jawahar's wider vision. And unfortunately Jinnah's too matter-of-fact politics and manoeuvrings on the one hand, and Gandhiji's too visionary politics on the other, and Jawahar's indecision led to a disastrous course.

Cripps's mission again provided an opportunity for a readjustment. The tragedy of it is that C.R. was the indirect cause of the breakdown of the Cripps negotiations. The last but one letter sent over Maulana's signature, as originally drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru after the fullest discussion in the Working Committee, did not contain any reference to the question of joint responsibility of the 'Cabinet'. C.R. asked me, when the revised draft was being prepared, to suggest to Jawaharlal to put in this reference.

Somehow he was under the impression that his moderation had annoyed Jawaharlal, and therefore he employed me as a bridge.

Eventually Jawaharlal, after consulting C.R. further, framed the relevant sentence according to C.R.'s suggestion. It was that very sentence which, ironically, became the last straw on Cripps's back. How strangely history moves behind the scenes!

After the failure of the Cripps mission, Gandhiji committed himself to a course which, in spite of the resistance of some-- Maulana and Jawahar (and in my humble way, myself)--culminated in the July and August resolutions of 1942.

*4th June 1944:* The mass movement part, or the sanction part as Gandhiji would call it, of the 'Quit India' resolution was a blunder of the first magnitude, the moral rights and wrongs notwithstanding. I maintained this to the last, despite the majority vote. The obvious course was to stop short at the 'sanction', and simply adopt the main resolution and to explain that the sanction was deliberately withheld in view of the difficulties of the situation. Directly afterwards, a round table consultation with the League should have been opened to clear the way to a unanimous demand for the necessary power to mobilise and organise the country against the Japanese menace. A golden opportunity was mangled and thrown away. I was furious and grief stricken. Jawaharlal and Maulana acquiesced in it in sheer helplessness.

Just think of the other course. A straightforward acceptance of Cripps's offer, under a reasoned and emphatic protest, and getting into the saddle would by now have enabled us to go a long way on the road to our goal. The very tempo of events would have brought about a spirit of practical give-and-take between the Congress and the League, and between India and Britain.

### **Congress President's Isolation**

Asaf Ali refers at many place in his Prison Diary to the unenviable situation in which Maulana Azad found himself as the Congress President during the period of detention at Ahmadnagar. Maulana's inclination to take an initiative to break the political impasse was not shared by a majority of members of the Working Committee including the two most important among them, Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel. Without their support, or at least that of Nehru, there was no question of Maulana persisting in the effort to persuade the Committee to his point of view. 'Leave it to Bapu' was the line of passivity favoured by the majority of Maulana's colleagues.

Like Asaf Ali, Jawaharlal Nehru maintained a prison diary at Ahmadnagar. His account corroborates and throws further light on the differences of view among Working Committee members. Interestingly, it bears out Asaf

Ali's suspicion that one reason why several Working Committee members favoured masterly inactivity for the duration of the war was that they had not the faintest idea what they should do if they were released at once.

There are some striking parallels in the narration and comments by Jawaharlal Nehru and by Asaf Ali in the Prison diary that each maintained at Ahmadnagar. The most significant is the mutually confirmatory and illuminating record, by the two, of the discussion that took place between Maulana Azad and his colleagues. It brings out the division of opinion among members of the Congress Working Committee on whether to try at all, and if so on what lines, to break the political deadlock.

Also of interest is the similarity in the appraisal of Gandhiji by Jawaharlal Nehru and Asaf Ali, both of whom see a decline in the Mahatma's leadership quality; their reflections on the underground movement of resistance to British rule; and the pessimism that colours their anticipations for India's future as both of them see themselves ageing.

There is a counterpart of Asaf Ali's candid criticism of Gandhiji as a leader, his moral greatness notwithstanding, in Jawaharlal Nehru's Prison Diary. On 14th July 1943, Nehru writes: "With all his very great qualities, he (Gandhiji) has proved a poor and weak leader, uncertain and changing his mind frequently. How many times he has changed during these last four years since the war began. It is very, very sad, this deterioration of a very great man. The greatness remains in many ways, but the sagacity and intuitive doing of the right thing are no longer in evidence."

Just as Asaf Ali is sorrowful that his wife should be engaged in futile resistance from underground, with its physical hardships and dangers, Jawaharlal Nehru says in a diary entry on 8th October 1943 on the arrest of Jaya Prakash Narayan (who had, after his escape from Hazaribagh Prison on 9th November 1942, directed the Congress underground): "The newspapers in the afternoon brought the news of Jaya Prakash's arrest in Lahore. This was nearly eleven months after his escape from Hazaribagh. This news made me sad, for the Government will take their revenge on him--the full pound of flesh. What a tragedy it is that a man like J.P. should waste his ability, courage and fine enthusiasms in negative work, in hiding, in prison--or is it going to be death for him?" There is unconscious irony in Jawaharlal Nehru classing 'prison' as part of negative activity. A point made by Asaf Ali repeatedly in his Random Jottings is that members of the Congress Working Committee including Nehru chose to waste their time vegetating in detention and 'tending flowers' while history was passing them by.

There is an echo, too, in Jawaharlal Nehru's Prison Diary of the note of pessimism which Asaf Ali sounds when he wonders (*Aruna and the Underground*, in the next Chapter) whether the sufferings of the fighters for freedom "will bear the fruit for the coming generations for which we have struggled." On 11th May 1943, Jawaharlal Nehru writes: "Men and women of my age have

spent nearly all our vital years in this struggle for India's freedom, fed on hope, and now we are ageing and the old fire and energy is no more. We may continue for some more years and we may even see a free India politically. But what of the mighty changes, social and economic, we planned, what of the lightning speed with which we were going to change the face of India and make her a tower of strength and progress, combining the wisdom and poise of old with the vigour and science of the new? Are we too old to undertake this burden; too old to have a real chance and opportunity?"

There is also a certain counterpoise in the mutual appraisal of each other by the two men. Asaf Ali notes with regret that Jawaharlal Nehru is liable to "impulsive outbursts". Nehru writes on 15th May 1943: "My reaction to events has been different in many ways from Asaf's because we are built differently. I have, I suppose, more vitality and resolution. The same happening may lead Asaf to more compromising avenues of thought, and me to more extreme and resentful moods. But this apart, the fact is that both of us see just blackness ahead. There is a difference though. My optimism for the world as a whole is not dead, though it is faint. It is the deadness and weakness of India that overwhelms me."

Also noteworthy is a charming admission by Jawaharlal Nehru of the justness of the criticism--voiced not only by Asaf Ali--of his tendency to sound omniscient on world affairs. Nehru writes on 21st November 1943: "My presumption in posing as the sole authority on international affairs is no doubt irritating."

Following are some excerpts from Jawaharlal Nehru's Prison Diary which bring out the differences of view among members of the Working Committee:

"Some days ago", writes Jawaharlal on 8th November 1943, "I asked Maulana (during my daily visit to the room after 4 o'clock tea) what advice he would give to Gandhiji about the present situation on the supposition that he met him and could talk to him frankly. I added that, so far as I was concerned, it was a very difficult question and I was by no means sure of the answer myself.

"Maulana's answer was quick and immediate, rather too eager I thought. He said he had no doubt about it. He would advise that owing to the new situation that is developing in the North-East of India, the appointment of Mountbatten to the South East Command and the probability of an offensive against Japan, also because of the famine in Bengal and elsewhere, the time has come to withdraw formally the A.I.C.C. resolution of August 8th about Civil Disobedience & c. and to go back to the previous resolution of the A.I.C.C. passed in Allahabad in May 1942. This meant that politically we were not cooperating with the British Government in India until circumstances changed and made it possible for us to cooperate honourably, but we did not wish to hinder in any way any operations against Japan. Also we would help in every way to meet the famine situation. He said he was quite clear that we could not cooperate politically with the British in present circumstances. But C.D. was

anyway dead and it would be right to admit this and formally end it. This would give the Congress an opportunity to function in some ways and prevent a further deterioration in the situation--political, communal and economic.

"I said that I agreed that C.D., such as there had been, was dead and there was no chance of its revival in the near future--to recognize a patent fact cannot be wrong--but in effect we had not started C.D. It had come more or less spontaneously; indeed something much more than C.D. had come. But declaring C.D. ended or advising the country not to indulge in it was one thing, and withdrawing the August 8th resolution was another and a more far-reaching thing. Apart from the C.D. clause in this resolution there was much else. Are we to withdraw all this? Maulana agreed that the rest might stand. It was only the operative C.D. clause that should be withdrawn. I said that I could conceive of this being done but I was doubtful of the consequences. If this was a one-sided effort on our part, it was possible that Congress would continue illegal and large numbers of our people remain as detenus or as convicted prisoners & c. Further, that most of the restrictions on public activities would prevent us from functioning effectively. We would be in a difficult position. Also if we made a move, *suo moto*, Government might say that it was not enough; we must give assurance of good behaviour for the future. How could we possibly do so?

"Maulana said that while he recognized difficulties and complications, he felt assured that if we took the step he suggested, the Congress would become a lawful organization and most of the people in prison would be discharged. We would have a chance of not only working for famine relief but of stopping the rot in the communal situation which was being deliberately encouraged by the British Govt.'s policy.

"There our talk that day ended. I had no other purpose in mind than to find out how Maulana's mind was working, and thereby to help my own mind to function. The question I had put was based on the possibility of our meeting Bapu. There was a hint in the papers that some such meeting might take place after Wavell came...That we here should do anything in the matter off our own bat did not appear to me necessary or desirable. So no question of immediate action arose in my mind. I dropped the matter.

"The next day, however, Maulana sent for Vallabhbhai and me and broached the subject again in a more definite and formal way.

"Maulana...wanted us to take the initiative in informing Government that we had decided to, or were prepared to, withdraw the C.D. part of the August Resolution in order to help in famine relief and not to hinder in the forthcoming operations against the Japanese in Burma. He made it clear that he was not for any political cooperation with the Government till circumstances changed... He merely wanted to go back to the passive non-cooperative position of pre-August days...

"Maulana spoke to us at some length and argued that we must be realists. The political and communal position was progressively deteriorating, largely

because of the British Government's persistent attempts to encourage the communal elements. Problems that had so far been difficult enough of solution were now tending to become insoluble. Our...presence outside would steady the position and prevent further deterioration, communal or political. This would lead to fresh openings for tackling the bigger problems. Such a course of action would be in the interests of Indian freedom, of the Congress, and would fit in with our wider world policy. Maulana added that he was sure that Gandhiji would approve of this action on our part.

"I was somewhat taken aback by his definiteness and eagerness, although our talk the day before had partly prepared me for some change in his outlook. My own reaction was instinctively against his proposal...Wavell had just taken charge and we should await developments. Very probably there would be none. Still one could not rule them out.

"Vallabhbhai said that he too sensed dangers in the proposed step. The matter required full consideration and we should not act in a hurry. He felt that Bapu was bound to take some step--he could not remain passive and silent--and we should wait for it.

"Maulana said: What step can he take except to go in for a long fast and that would not do much good. Anyway he said that there was no immediate hurry and we might wait for two or three months...

"I do not just see how we can revert, even if some of us wanted to, to normal politics so long as a vital change does not take place in the situation. What am I to do if I was suddenly released and conditions continued as they are?"

Jawaharlal Nehru says in a further entry in his Prison Diary on 11th November 1943: "I am convinced that we can only go out honourably and holding to our basic position. No sackcloth & ashes, no withdrawals &c. I feel that we are serving the cause of India even by remaining in prison, much as I dislike this inactivity. Events (and we) have brought matters to a pass when half-way houses are ruled out...

"Then there is the question of Bapu. I cannot imagine his remaining inert and passive indefinitely. The burden is his and he must be conscious of it. Apart from the political developments he must be terribly distressed by the famine...What can he do? What else but fast and fast to death?"

The subsequent entries on this subject in Jawaharlal Nehru's Prison Diary are as under:

"On the 15th morning Maulana said he wanted us all to meet that afternoon for a talk. So we met in the most convenient place, Pantji's room. Maulana came out with his proposal about writing to Govt--what he had told Vallabhbhai and me a fortnight or so earlier. He spoke for an hour and a quarter. Was definite but still not convincing --that is to say, his presentment of the proposal was not particularly good. That ended the first day's session. I was asked to say something the next day.

"I spoke for an absurdly long time--an hour and a half-- discursive, not concise but definite in opposition to Maulana's suggestions. On the whole I carried on quietly, as I wanted to, but occasionally broke out into heroics! Vallabhbhai followed me briefly then and continued the next day. Strong, pointed, clear and not too long. He has got a lucid mind, though it may not be deep. He holds to certain anchors and has a strong practical sense. He opposed Maulana's proposal. Pantji--clear, moderate in expression, brief but definite enough. What occasion has arisen for this move? Dangers, risks

"Profulla Babu--strong & rather unrestrained language. He would rather take potassium cyanide (and advise all of us to take it!) rather than agree to any such humiliating course of action. Shanker Rao also strong in opposition. Ended up by appealing to Maulana to uproot the idea from his mind and throw it away. Narendra Deva: academical, theoretical, professional. I like Narendra Deva more and more but he is so lacking in contact with reality, lives in theories. However, his conclusion was the same as mine and the others. Kripalani and Mehtab had nothing to add.

"Then Mahmud--beside the point, emotional, appealing. Find a way out &c. Communal situation.

"Asaf--clever--instead of discussing matter in issue, complained that we were insulting Maulana by suggesting that he could make a proposal which was humiliation to ourselves, the Congress or the country. This turn given by Asaf worried and annoyed Vallabhbhai. He mentioned it to me. The next day (that is, 19th Nov.) Shanker Rao wanted to say something about it. Vallabhbhai chimed in saying that it was impossible to have frank talk if such insinuations were made. Maulana, however, asked them to listen to him first and then to have their say.

"Maulana spoke for an hour and 40 minutes. He was obviously angry, more especially with Shanker Rao and Profulla for some of their remarks the day before which he considered derogatory to himself. He let himself go--said hard things--repeated himself, was rather bullying (the worst possible attitude if one is trying to convince). He explained his proposal more fully--dealt with the possible consequences. And then threw out a very remarkable and significant hint about the communal problem. This was that we should tone down a little towards Govt. (not giving up our position in any way but still) and then with its help we shall be able to solve the problem easily. This took my breath away for it opened out new vistas, entirely new approaches. If this was the objective then obviously the old arguments, built on different premises, hardly applied.

"Maulana stopped. Profulla & Shanker Rao then spoke very warmly in their own defence and objecting strongly to Maulana's remarks. Maulana in reply toned down somewhat.

"An unsavoury episode. Profulla & Shanker Rao had not been happy in their original remarks but obviously they meant no offence. Profulla Babu's



manner is often very irritating. He smiles at the wrong moment and appears to look round for applause. But Maulana went very far in his chastisement and created a bad impression. Everybody hard and stiff & strained. Vallabhbhai quiet but obviously angry.

"Nov. 21 (Sunday) 1943: The week's debauch of political talks and arguments is over. After six days of it--six afternoons--we rest. Yesterday not much happened. There was a feeling of anti-climax. Maulana said a few words, so did some others. Then I took some time with an analysis of the possible consequences of Maulana's original proposal, pointing out its risks & dangers at present at least. A flash of irritation of Vallabhbhai and Kripalani against me for my 'superiority complex' and supposed suggestion that others knew nothing of world affairs. It was partly due to a misapprehension and it passed. But my presumption in posing as the sole authority on international affairs is no doubt irritating.

"Feelings are toned down though a slight soreness remains. Even that will gradually pass but what will not pass and cannot pass is the mental gap between various members of the Working Committee. It is really difficult to discuss any important matter because of suspicion and prejudice that immediately raise their heads. To criticise any step taken by Bapu is *lese majeste*. That is the hiatus between the so-called Gandhite members of the W.C. and the others."

Asaf Ali's diary entries, like Jawaharlal Nehru's, give a vivid account of the attitude of different members of the Congress Working Committee during the period of their detention, and of Maulana Azad's helpless position. Asaf Ali adds his own running comments on the developing political situation outside the fortress prison where they were immured:

8th January 1943: I do not approve of shirking responsibilities as some of us are prone to do. To demand--and rightly so --the transfer of power, and then fight shy of what power is available betrays, to my mind, a negative and timid attitude. I am not suggesting that we rejected Cripps' offer out of timidity. No, it was Cripps's principals--whoever were pulling the strings--who manoeuvred themselves out of our acceptance. But I do maintain that we should not have allowed ourselves to be entombed here as we now are.

The first opportunity to rejoin issue with the British regime arose when, soon after interning us, they started smearing us with mud. We should have at once nailed their lies to the counter. I suggested this to Maulana and I think he and Jawahar were inclined to do so. But some wiseacres vetoed the suggestion after a perfunctory debate. It was not up to us, they said, to take notice of what happened outside as long as we were held in detention. I did not agree with that view, and I still think that we let an excellent opportunity slip.

Again, the Viceroy spoke and almost invited a reply. We slept over it. Perhaps dumb huff, according to some of us, is sound strategy. I do not

think so. I believe in unremitting effort.

And now, with the arrival of Phillips from New York, a further stage may be reached. America has stood by us so far. And if Phillips provides an opening, we should thrust ourselves into the breach. There is no earthly point in leading the lives of prematurely superannuated and squashed-out lemons, leaving the most vital moment in world history to find us tending flowers.

What Gandhiji is doing or has done so far, it is impossible to guess.<sup>7</sup> But it is surprising that he has allowed five vital months to elapse. I can't make out how he has allowed all this time to glide by without one of his grand acts--another epic fast or something. I wonder whether Mahadev's death has shocked him into a mood of Aurobindo-like detachment and reticence! If so, it is time that Jawahar and Maulana woke up, and something was done to stage a return to activity.

**22nd January 1943:** It has been my firm belief since the day the Government started smearing the Congress with the charge of planning a violent coup that an authoritative refutation should be issued. But I was voted down. Meanwhile a senseless campaign of futile violence has been pursued by some party which believes in such methods. And I dare say some of the underground socialists and others may have sympathised with it. Being opposed to a complacent acquiescence in the deadlock, it occurred to me two days ago that I might stir the stagnant waters a bit by firing a few trenchant posers at the Government in view of the forthcoming Budget session of the Central Assembly.

I mentioned it to J.N. In fact I had drafted a telegram addressed to Sultan Ahmed. Jawahar suggested that it should be a letter, and should be emphatic in the repudiation of *ex parte* charges. He further advised a consultation with Maulana. I had that fully in mind, but had postponed it in order to secure J.N.'s concurrence before going to Maulana. I wanted a sure passage of my proposal.

After drafting the letter which J.N. had practically outlined for me, I showed it to him and after his approval went to Maulana. Initially he seemed skeptical but after a fuller explanation by me became more flexible. In the course of our discussion, which Jawahar soon joined, I asked Maulana if he had any alternative in view. Maulana said that a move from the other side would be more appropriate, upon which I pointed out that there was precious little chance of that in the foreseeable future.

At this point Jawahar mounted an astonishing attack on the whole idea of a letter, and made statements worthy of a fire-breathing Quixote. I was taken aback, but remained cool, and said softly: "But, Jawahar, this is practically your draft!" The effect was almost magical. He admitted that there was nothing exceptionable in the proposed communication. It was enough for me, for I had no desire left to go any further in my self-

appointed task of pushing in the thin end of the wedge.

Though I took the incident with good grace, I felt let down by Jawaharlal. Lovable, and most worthy of admiration in many ways, I fear he is liable to be swayed by some incalculable complex in his nature at critical junctures in political history. And he is *the* best without comparison.

So I have decided tentatively to retire from politics on the 10th May next, and begin my 56th year with a clean slate for such literary work as I may be capable of. For a variety of reasons both personal and public, my mind has been pursuing this path for some time, at least since the Working Committee meeting at Allahabad in April last. But the mere thought of abandoning the team in the middle of the game appeared despicable. But now that we have touched shore in a sense--being properly marooned--I think I can reasonably think about the future.

I have spent some 28 years in public life on an uphill journey, contributing my mite to the winning of India's freedom. There comes, I imagine, a time in everyone's life for making a decision as to how the concluding years of one's life are to be lived.

*26th January 1943* : At 5 p.m. we got together in the next room. Maulana, Jawaharlal and Vallabhbhai said a few words on the world and Indian political situation, before we reaffirmed the Independence Pledge. I fear we are clumsy failures with angelic aspirations. It was tragic to hear today Jawaharlal Nehru, whom merit and fortune have combined to make a national hero, speak of the complex problems outside while he remains confined and immobilised.

As for Maulana, he is borne along by the current of events. With Gandhiji pulling towards Heaven, and Jawaharlal trying to bring down from Heaven an ideal world, Maulana is unsure what to do with the reins of the chariot. This is a tragedy.

Procrastination is the curse of practical politics and the paradise of those who hope, like Micawber, that something will turn up some day. They keep pushing unpleasant realities out of their ken. Illusions are more agreeable to sensitive minds than realities. Gandhiji is an illusionist of the first magnitude--and Jawaharlal, intensely realistic in many ways, stumbles at the feet of his own illusions. Caught between the two, Maulana, I fear, finds the weight heavy.

The rest of us don't really count. Having realised it, I find myself a useless string to the lyre of three--in fact two--effective strings, producing if anything a cacaphonous note. Hence my desire to retire.

*22nd June 1943*: So Marshal Wavell has been designated the Governor-General. There is a chorus of subdued disapproval in the newspapers. But if he is of the type of Allenby, I see no reason why he should not prove different to Linlithgow. I have an idea that apart from the war, which will be Wavell's primary job, he may prove more straightforward.

**28th July 1943:** I have been utterly out of tune with the Working Committee since the Allahabad meeting of April-May last year. I was with C.R., and but for Maulana, I would have resigned right then and been out of it all. And again in July last year, at Wardha, I was on the point of resigning. But because it would look as if it was to avoid imprisonment, I refrained from resigning. I could not endorse Gandhiji's programme of mass struggle, although at the time it seemed as if it might not come to that. The approach of struggle, in the middle of the war, seemed to be wholly wrong. Maulana felt the same way, and so did Mahmud. Even in Bombay, last August, I made it clear that it was only as a matter of discipline that I was yielding.

This feeling has only deepened in me. The turn which the Government has given the whole thing, and the interpretation which Jinnah has put on our demand for a national government have made it incumbent on the Congress to right itself with the United Nations and the League. Being immobilised, it is doing neither, and wholly wrong interpretations and misunderstandings continue to multiply.

The politics of our unfortunate country is degenerating into an insoluble conundrum. The Hindu-Muslim squabble is getting more and more complex. Power has made the British adamant, and a feeling of growing power has, it appears, made the Muslim League, or at least Jinnah, equally adamant. And the Congress has got into a cleft stick--thanks to Gandhiji. If, even now, the Hindu-Muslim and Indian States' problem is satisfactorily settled, India will have some sort of free status within the Anglo-American ambit. And this is just what was envisaged by Cripps's proposal. I see no reason why a Congress-League understanding should not be reached. In fact it should have been reached much before now. I struggled hard in 1940-41, and even 1942, to urge this. But somehow merely human weaknesses of high personages, and Jinnah's rather repugnant way of rejecting every approach, prevented it.

I must admit that, whatever may have been the shortcomings of the Congress earlier in this respect, by 1942 they became ready, short of surrendering outright to Jinnah's dictation, for a settlement with the League. And I think they would have even accepted much of what Jinnah wanted, if only he had proceeded in a polite and conciliatory way.

And now? The Muslims of the majority provinces can have the right to secede for the asking, if only the majority areas are properly demarcated and outstanding problems are settled through discussion. In my opinion, secession will not be an advantage from any point of view. But if the Muslims want it they can have it, and the Congress will not stand in the way. But where is the opportunity for the Congress to meet the League now, immured here as the Working Committee is? And I doubt whether

the Government desires such a consummation. They have made Gandhiji's Quit India resolution an excuse for maintaining the deadlock.

*15th November 1943* : For weeks, nay months, I have been discussing with Maulana and some others the sorry plight to which Gandhiji's blunder has reduced all of us and the country. Maulana had, on his own, come to the same conclusion. So had Mahmud. All the three of us had opposed the July and August resolution as suicidal. Some others also, it seems, feel the same way but they do not admit it. Jawaharlal is fully aware of it: but he is one of those who cannot retrace a wrong step without feeling humiliated, and is therefore obstinately reluctant to admit Gandhiji's Himalayan blunder. Or, having admitted it to himself, wants some happy chance to rescue him from this stifling morass. Others, too, of the Gandhian party await some face-saving occurrence. I have been of the opinion that these people should retrace their steps and there should be a complete reorientation.

Fortunately, Maulana made up his mind a fortnight ago. He first talked to Jawaharlal and Vallabhbhai. They hummed and hawed, and initially resisted his suggestion that the Working Committee should write to Government that in view of the terrible famine in Bengal, and the Government's resolve to carry the war to the Japanese-occupied territories, the Working Committee is prepared to forget the past and cooperate with the Government and all parties. They were not opposed to ending the deadlock, but felt that the change of vicerealty indicated a change of Government's policy and we should therefore await an announcement by Lord Wavell. Maulana and I have felt otherwise. We are of the view that an initiative to break the deadlock should be taken by the Working Committee.

Today Maulana collected them for the first time in 15 months to tell them what he felt. He spoke for an hour, and urged that it would be graceful and advantageous if the initiative originated from our side rather than the Government. Further discussion is postponed till tomorrow.

*19th November 1943*: The debate begun on the 15th still continues. It is to conclude today with closing remarks by Maulana. The exchange of views has shown the same old cleavages of the last four years. The Gandhian bloc is as incomprehensible as ever--anxious to get out of the blind alley, but touchy about Gandhiji's prestige. Maulana, Mahmud and myself as clear as before that the impasse must end. If the deadlock is not broken in Gandhiji's lifetime (and he is so old and weak), then whoever succeeds to leadership, whether Jawaharlal or a Committee, will inherit chaos.

Jawaharlal is the 'lonely furrow' he has always been. His stumbling blocks are Gandhiji and his own impulsive nature.

*20th November 1943* : Maulana spoke for two hours yesterday while

winding up the debate, and will continue today.

He put forward his case (our case) vigorously and brilliantly. But owing to a personal incident (a sharp breach between him and Ghosh and Shankerrao) there was considerable unpleasantness, and I fear much of Maulana's eloquence was lost on the Gandhian party. They, of course, maintain that: (1) the initiative must rest with Gandhiji; and (2) under no circumstances should there be 'unconditional surrender'. They believe that by going out without a political settlement they will not be able to achieve anything whereas continuance of the deadlock, according to them, is bound to lead to a decline of the League's extremism. I do not see why they should not be ready to settle the communal issue. Further, what will they do if they are released unconditionally?

*21st November 1943* :The debate came to an end yesterday with a final speech by Maulana and closing remarks by Jawaharlal. At the beginning of the day it threatened to be stormy. But Maulana acted with tact and spoke with great calm.

The conclusion was foregone after the opposition to Maulana's proposal from Jawaharlal, Vallabhbhai and others. Jawaharlal was, as usual, obsessed by the "elemental world forces". He is angry with the Government, and at the same time apprehensive of the difficulties he will have to face if released. The future is full of gloom if these people do not make up their minds about the problems. They seem to me to expect too much from their masterly inactivity.

*6th December 1943*: Four days ago Maulana started reviewing the Congress-Muslim position to me and Mahmud, every evening for an hour. The idea was to survey the past and consider the future.

The first two days he dipped into the distant past. In reviewing the course of more recent events, he has been an apologist of Congress policy rather than an incisive critic. Personally I think it is time that merciless self-criticism was undertaken by nationalist Muslims and Hindu Congressmen. Results are the soundest test in politics. A compromise which secures desirable results is infinitely better than stickling for sound but barren principles. Indian Muslims as a bulk are dissatisfied with the policies of the Congress, howsoever well-intentioned they may have been. A practical politician would take note of it and alter the course of his policies.

*7th December 1943*: Last night Maulana concluded his review.

While admitting in a general way the errors of the Congress in respect of the League, he expressed himself in emphatic terms against Jinnah's method of negotiation during the last four or five years.

Finally Maulana set out his own view. He had come to the conclusion, he said, that the right of secession should be conceded to all units, at any rate to the Muslim-majority provinces, but in the common interest an ex-

perimental federation should be brought into existence to begin with. And after, say, a decade's experience the aggrieved units may secede. (This is what I proposed before the disastrous Bombay resolution of August 1942.) But I fear that this proposal is a little too late.

The last count of his indictment of Jinnah was interesting. On the 6th of August, Maulana said, Mohammed Ali Raoji, the Aga Khan's secretary, came round to Birla House while the Working Committee was in session, and wanted to know whether the Congress was sincere in its offer, namely that if power were genuinely transferred, the League may be entrusted with the formation of the government at the Centre. This was confirmed by Gandhiji in a letter to Raoji. When confronted with it, Jinnah turned upon Raoji and berated him soundly for "the mischievous act".

Both the Congress and League are, I fear, drifting into the mood of piqued children. What we need are not obdurate and logic-chopping politicians, but large-hearted statesmen. Now Gandhi is a great man but is too great for India and has therefore brought India to grief. Jawaharlal Nehru has a large heart, I think, and big dreams, but he has come a cropper at this crisis because he has surrendered to mass hysteria. Meanwhile the world is passing by India, occasionally chucking a few words of sympathy at it like dole to a blind beggar.

*27th January 1944:* Confident, dignified and effectual statesmanship is one thing and impotent pride another. I regret to say that many among our topmost nationalists are suffering from the malady of pique. It is, I fear, the result of an agitational attitude. In my opinion the time for it is past, and what is needed today is the confidence of statesmanship. The outburst of petulance in the case of Patel & Co., to which I have referred, is the result of hurt nationalist pride and self-tormenting impotence.

*28th January 1944:* I have been thinking of it all again. I am beginning to feel that a majority of the friends here (not Maulana--and I hope not Jawaharlal) have come to the conclusion that they will not be able to unravel the tangled skein of the political impasse if they are free today. They are far from decided in their minds about the League, for instance. And therefore they would prefer to stay, incapacitated, where they are while the war lasts. I do not find even Jawaharlal strong enough to cut away from these influences. But this attitude is escapist. Nothing rights itself in politics unless you put your shoulder to the wheel and push the stranded vehicle.

I am not unaware of the complications. But it is the task of statesmanship to get over them. The present state of affairs is the result of a blunder. It must be straightened out. Of course, one cannot lower the flag of self-respect. What I have pleaded for all this time is a careful retracing of steps. It is a battle of wits. In such a battle it is wrong to allow even the slightest

opening to slip by. However, I cannot do more than one man can. No, Maulana is with me, or rather he is fully alive to the situation but finds himself in a most awkward position.

*12th February 1944:* They were debating the release of Congress detenus in the Central Assembly on the 8th. Maxwell again came out with his prosecuting counsel's speech. According to the correspondent of the *Times of India*, he tried to make out that the Congress wanted to seize power to be in a position to get out of the war or make terms with the Japanese. All these allegations are false, and I felt that they should be refuted. I drafted a communication to the Governor General in Council, which said inter alia: "As Secretary of the Congress Party in the Central Legislative Assembly I feel bound to invite your attention to the grave inaccuracy of certain statements made by the Hon'ble Home Member on the 8th of this month in the course of a debate in the Assembly...At a time when the British Government was pursuing the policy of appeasement, condoning Japanese aggression in China, sanctioning Italian aggression in Abyssinia and elsewhere in Europe, and acquiescing in the rape of Austria and Czechoslovakia, it was the Congress that was vehemently denouncing these betrayals, both in and outside the Assembly. Since 1935 the Congress through its Party in the Central Legislature continued to condemn the Government's shortsightedness in holding back the development of India's war potential and preventing the Indian army from growing into a powerful striking force of the nation. Again, the woeful inadequacy of India's defences in the North East Frontier, the absence of mechanised land forces and anti-aircraft defences, and the deplorable inadequacy of the Air Force were all pointed out and remedies suggested. As late as 1942, in the course of the Cripps negotiations, the stress on the popularisation of India's war effort and on an effective voice in developing and organising the country's defence was entirely due to the anxiety of the Congress to secure a rapid speeding up of the country's participation in the war alongside the United Nations...The propaganda by the Government is not unlikely to produce the very opposite of the effect which it desires to produce. If those who are, in the estimation of millions, devoted patriots are represented to hold such views, is not the Government running the grave risk of misguiding these millions into wrong paths? This sort of propaganda presents to the enemy a picture of the Indian situation which, though entirely false in fact, would be most welcome to him, and may in the long run affect the course of the war in a wholly unwanted direction." Maulana approved of this draft but Jawahar, while describing it as an excellent document, maintained that it was not the right time for it. Joining issue now might give them a false feeling that their policy of suppression was succeeding.

We had a long discussion. I am afraid Jawaharlal is somewhat obsessed



*From Asaf Ali's Prison Diary at Ahmadnagar*

/ As Secretary of the Congress Party in the Central Legislative Assembly, I feel bound to draw your attention to <sup>the gross inaccuracy of</sup> certain statements made by the Honble Home Member on the 8th of this month in the course of a debate in the Assembly. While repeating the familiar argument <sup>against the Co-view</sup> (which has been fully answered by Gandhiji in his correspondence with Lord Dunsford) and recapitulating <sup>in</sup> the old <sup>disingenuous</sup> allegations (already disposed of & refuted by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in his letter to the late Viceroy) he is reported to have asserted that (1) the Congress wanted to seize power... to be in a position to get out of war or make terms with Japs - Times of India, Feb. 10th, page 1, Column 5; and (2) <sup>further</sup> ~~to be~~ <sup>that</sup> the Home Member <sup>is</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>has</sup> attributed what he described as "a story of repeated & consistent Congress refusal of all offers..... to secure Congress cooperation with other parties in the War administration" - Same, Column 6.

I cannot help feeling that these exploded <sup>my</sup> allegations, which rest on no Congress resolutions have been recorded only to support ~~an~~

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with his reading of the trend of world events. He may be right in his view of the pressure of world forces on the British Government. But I cannot understand his wanting to ignore false propaganda. After all, even Gandhiji does not sit tight in the face of false accusations. In fact he believes in a constant stream of correctives. One of the rules of his Satyagraha is to pursue the object by constant, polite and sincere protest against wrong assumptions.

However, now that my effort once again in what I regard the right direction is gone by the board, I am becoming indifferent.

*14th March 1944:* The newspapers carry a report that Gandhiji has sent a long letter in reply to the notice of the grounds for detention. According to the report, Gandhiji has said that he was not given an opportunity to come to terms with the Government, and that he did not launch a mass movement. I do not know how far the story is correct, but Malaviyaji has, on the basis of this report, issued a statement demanding Gandhiji's release. I suggested a reply here on the same lines, but after a debate the idea was given up.

The fact is that in April 1942 the Congress held the key to the political situation, and but for Gandhiji's move at Wardha in July the Congress could have put the country on the high road to the realisation of its destiny. Maulana protested vehemently against the proposed resolution at Wardha, and the discussion therefore dragged on for a week. I argued against it almost with naked bitterness. Mahmud reasoned with all the emphasis he could command. And even Pant, who is generally slow to oppose even when he wants to, expressed doubts. But Jawahar, after a brilliant analysis of the situation which clearly went against Gandhiji, just let us down in the end. By this I mean he fell in with Gandhiji because, as he explained privately, it was no use: for the old man was determined to act, and it meant that he himself would be dragged in willy-nilly. That, I think, has been Jawaharlal's weak point.

Maulana could hardly resign at such a time: but he did tender his resignation, which was not accepted. I and Mahmud felt helpless. Mahmud was, even so, for resigning. But I told him that if he and I resigned, Maulana would feel deserted. The Wardha resolution was a wrong step at a critical situation. Of course there are those who maintain that, by remaining in jails, Congressmen have raised the stock of the country. Jawaharlal nearly admits the initial error, but he has convinced himself by now that on the whole it has not failed to do some good to the country. I do not think so. It has done nothing but knock out the Congress and protract the agony of waiting. It may cover up the bankruptcy of statemanship, but the situation can be satisfactory only to those who feel diffident of coming to terms with the League and forming a stable government to build up the country's strength to face the problems of war and peace.

I have no doubt whatever that if we had taken over under Cripps's offer, by now we would have made considerable progress in solving knotty problems and moving towards freedom. I am sure Jawaharlal also thinks the same in his private thoughts. Maulana does, and has often told me as much. Even Pant, in long talks with me, has not challenged my conclusions. But he said (in Urdu): "Anyway, now that we are in this boat, there is nothing for it but to be cheerful."

*13th April 1944:* Maulana and others are watching the Assam border situation most anxiously, and would take an early opportunity to tell the Viceroy that the situation demands the closing up of the ranks. In any case, we want the country to know that the Japanese aggressor should be repelled. I have been urging such a declaration from the start. In the course of a letter to Nora<sup>8</sup> a fortnight ago, I said: "The news of the Japanese invasion is most disagreeable. Even when we are buried alive, the country as a whole should repel it." Bardolai has now made a public appeal that all parties should consider the situation and Assam should be fully organised to resist the invader. This is good. There have never been any differences of opinion on this point, notwithstanding the propaganda of the Government to the contrary.

*20th April 1944:* For the last five or six days Maulana, Jawahar, Pant, Vallabhbhai and I have discussed the situation on the Assam border. Maulana is of opinion that Bardolai's statement should be approvingly endorsed, and a further declaration made consisting of: (1) reiteration of the anti-Japanese policy of the Congress; (2) an appeal to the country to resist; and (3) a call for cessation of the Congress-Government dispute. Jawahar and Pant agree to (1) and (2) but consider (3) superfluous and uncalled for. Maulana considers (3) essential.

Vallabhbhai seems to think that such a communication to the Government would only encourage them to seek to humiliate us. But really he would like Gandhiji to make such a declaration. Discussions are still going on. I am afraid they are wasting precious time. Even if (3) is not agreed to (though it is admitted that there is no further civil disobedience), they should lose no time in communicating (1) and (2). This is most essential to end the confusion and the sense of frustration now prevailing in the country.

How Gandhiji's mind is moving none can guess. He has been wanting to retrace his steps. But as a Satyagrahi he must have fixed some minimum--say, being brought together with us here--as a bridge to cross over the chasm. He may be waiting for the Government's acceptance of his minimum. But this is scarcely the occasion for such a wait. I am quite impatient with these futilities.

*3rd May 1944 :* They are still talking of bringing Gandhiji here. But he is not too well just now. The net result is that the proposal to reiterate the

Congress resolution to oppose and fight the Japanese hangs fire. Valuable time is passing.

Personally I would not have waited for a moment. And Maulana and Jawaharlal thought the same, and also Mahmud and Pant. But on hearing that Gandhiji was coming, the others wanted to wait till his arrival.

Gandhiji's condition is reported to have worsened as regards blood pressure and anaemia. Government says that it is causing anxiety. God knows what is going to happen.

*6th May 1944* : So Gandhiji has been unconditionally released on medical grounds. The news was heard on the radio and brought by the Superintendent this morning.

I have a feeling that he will seek to restore normal conditions if his health will permit him to do so. This should pave the way to a reapproachment.

*25th May 1944*: I have just finished Louis Fischer's 'One week with Gandhi'. It is a revelation. Persons like Mirabehn and Narendra Dev who were with Gandhiji at the time in his ashram encouraged the state of mind in which he conceived his *coup de grace*. How utterly unrealistic were his assumptions--for a statesman and politician of his fame and greatness! It is incredible. Were only Jawaharlal adamant, the disaster could have been staved off. But Jawaharlal succumbed, and Maulana was knocked on the head. The rest of us after that did not count.

Jawaharlal felt that Gandhiji was determined, and therefore, after modifying some impossibilities like unconditional 'Quit India', he surrendered his judgement. I feel that I am through with this sort of haphazard public life dependent on Gandhian uncertainties. Jawaharlal will take time yet to come into his own. And I fear Maulana will never be able to sway the Congress as against other leaders.

Here was a historic occasion for consolidating India's gains and building up moral and material power during the war by active cooperation with the United Nations. This would have led to India's freedom as night leads to dawn, and would have enabled the disinherited of ages to come into their own. It may happen yet: but valuable years have been frittered away. Gandhiji is now out and one does not know what he is going to do. If he allows the present drift to continue, the Congress will arrive at the feast only as a guest by the others' grace.

*29th June 1944* : The full text of Gandhiji's reply to Government's charges reveals an amazing mind. His penetrative subtlety furnishes proof of a mind which will rank among the most wide-awake minds of the world of all times. He does not shrink from pursuing the path of logical reasoning to its end, howsoever disconcerting the conclusion. He has a path, and he pursues it with an unshakeable faith. His non-violence is a way of life, and a straight path to his goal. But I wonder how many in the world, even when appreciating his viewpoint and acknowledging the success of the method

of non-violent non-cooperation in minor experiments, will have the faith and conviction to test its efficacy in the face of a world-consuming death struggle of extreme violence. This faith of his amazes me. Politically I wonder whether his approach is likely to bear any fruit. If it does, he will have demonstrated the potency of his faith. If it does not, it will die with him, and the world will go on pursuing the old and tried expedients.

From a practical point of view, Gandhiji's statement of his views is so worded that the British imperialists, if they are so disposed, can argue that it is risky to trust a Gandhi-guided government to pursue the war effort to its logical end. It is not true. Once a Congress-League government is formed, the situation will change radically. If I were Wavell I would release the detenus--the Working Committee to begin with--so that they can meet Gandhiji. The result could be surprisingly great. Nobody here is in a mood for any mass movement now. At least so Patel told me only yesterday and he represents the Gandhi group. Jawaharlal, I fear, stands alone. He sometimes feels and talks like one walking in sleep. When he says "To hell with submission", he seems to invoke sentiment to strengthen himself against the logic of events which call for negotiation and compromise. As for Maulana, he is both angry and despondent. Yesterday when I urged him to read the fuller report of Gandhiji's reply to Tottenham, he went the length of saying: "What is the good of it? My heart has gone cold. I have no more interest left in this business."

*1st July 1944:* Gandhiji says he cannot speak in the name of the Congress, for he ceased to exercise the authority he had from the A.I.C.C. the day he entered prison! That is the language of Satyagraha. I am sure I shall never be able to learn this language. The vocabulary is beyond my grasp and my range. What is the meaning of his disclaiming the position of an adviser to the hundreds of thousands of Congress men and women in their present plight?

*9th July 1944:* Looking through the privately circulated correspondence between Gandhiji and two Viceroys and others (a copy received by Sardar Patel), I lighted to my agreeable surprise on Gandhiji's reply to the Notice of 'grounds of detention'. His reply, brief and to the point, is couched in terms almost identical with the words I had put into my draft, six months ago, which was turned down here. Patel refused at that time to believe that Gandhiji would take any notice of the Notice. Jawaharlal thought that my position was logical but it was inadvisable to send any reply. I have drawn their attention now to Gandhiji's reply. I suppose they realise that they were wrong and I was right, but they won't admit it.

Gandhiji's other letters further disclose the fact that he took up questions exactly when I proposed that we should. But I was outvoted here each time. Ironically enough, in spite of my disagreement with Gandhiji on larger questions I seem to understand the working of his mind better than

these gentlemen. What Jawaharlal dismisses as the lawyer's approach, in my case, is the very breath of Gandhiji's satyagraha technique. The fact is that none of the professed Gandhians here has really subscribed to his faith. They are therefore unable to get rid of their inferiority complex, which saps confidence.

Mahmud has taken the same view as I have. Pant is a person of acute mind and penetrating intelligence, and sees things quite clearly. But he, I regret to say, does not believe in asserting his opinion against Jawaharlal's, and differs from Patel only with discretion. Patel and the others rely on Gandhiji to do everything for them. As for Maulana, he sees things clearly but has not been able to carry with him Jawaharlal and Patel, and therefore the majority. Result: fuming and inaction. This is not a working team but one which must of necessity keep up appearances against the adversary. We agree on the issue of India's freedom, and have differences on virtually every other point.

*13th July 1944:* The political climate of the country has undergone a radical change during the last four days. First came the release of correspondence between C.R. and Jinnah, which revealed Gandhiji's agreement with C.R.'s 'Pakistan' formula. It is a carefully thought out and positive version of what the Working Committee had conceded at the time of the Cripps Mission, namely the principle of secession. But it is to be applied at the level of districts in which Muslims are in absolute majority in the north-west and north-east of India. Gandhiji's endorsement places those who raised the demand for Pakistan in an awkward position, and shifts to them the burden of clarifying their position.

## **A Sub-Continental Commonwealth**

*13th October 1942:* Reading yesterday's newspapers, I came across a statement by Jinnah which made me think, and think furiously. It was intended to be an Id message to all Indian Muslims. I suppose I am among the addressees, although Jinnah would rather exclude those who have had the temerity to disagree with him.

He talks of one hundred million Indian Mussalmans being one compact body with a common religion, civilization and culture who must have sovereign and independent states in the north-east and north-west of India. He calls these their homelands, where they are as many as seventy million--I suppose some 30 million in the north-west and 40 million in the north-east. He does not say what is to happen to the remaining 30 million who, in spite of the compactness claimed by him, are scattered in sparse numbers over the remaining three-fourths of the great sub-continent of India.

Not does he even so much as refer to the vast body of non-Muslims who will be left in the Muslim homelands. If the boundaries of the provinces

remain what they are, then the Muslim homelands will have a non-Muslim population of some 40 to 45 million--in no degree less martial than the Muslims in the Punjab and, in Bengal, decidedly far more influential than the Muslim majority. If, on the other hand, predominantly Hindu and Sikh portions of Bengal and Punjab are lopped off, the minority of the non-Muslim population of the remnant of the Muslim homelands will be much smaller than the Muslims left outside the homelands.

As for the economic resources of these homelands, dismembered by a uniform application of the principle of self-determination by Muslims and non-Muslims, Jinnah has failed to give a clear idea. In spite of his tempting picture of a solid Muslim state, I fear I remain unconvinced. His dream will become a nightmare for a majority of Indian Muslims if it results in ill will. But with good will and a general agreement on friendly future relations, such a venture may satisfy vanities even if there is no remarkable material gain.

I condemn Hindu imperialist dreams equally emphatically. But it seems a difficult task to drum common sense into the heads of proud Hindu or Muslim imperialists who will not give up grandiose visions of vast Asokan or Mughal empires. Where is one to draw the line? Should the Egyptians, on the ground of history, claim the better part of Arabia, or the Arabs the right to rule over Spain and North Africa, or the Greeks Persians and Romans the enormous areas which conquerors of the past had at one time possessed? Nothing but the arbitrament of the sword--and now of the armoured eagles of the air, and tanks and long-range guns-- will decide such conflicting claims. The world has had more than enough of fratricide. With good will, Hindus and Muslims, if they do not settle down as members of the same nation, can be allies knitted together in common economic bonds, with equal dignity and opportunity for peaceful achievement. But then neither Jinnah nor Savarkar should make conflicting claims seeking Muslim or Hindu aggrandisement at one another's cost. Our watchword should be: 'Live and let live in a free and dignified family of mankind.'

*21st October 1942:* There is little doubt that the victors in the present war would want to secure a firm hold in Iraq, Iran, Palestine and Syria. It is equally certain that the so-called sovereign Muslim states which the Muslim League has projected, far from standing on their own legs, will pass imperceptibly under the domination of either the British or the Axis powers, according to the result of the war.

Therefore, situated as the Indian Muslims are, their interests demand that they should join hands with the Congress on honourable terms and, after helping the birth of free India, secure their future against the tide of domination by the age-long destroyers of Muslim powers. This policy was laid down by the authors of the Khilafat movement of 1915-1924, and

I am convinced that the policy was sound and beneficial. A curious feature is that Jinnah was more or less at variance with this policy, and today his main supporters are drawn from the ranks of those who, in those far-off days of general upheaval, had the audacity to act counter to general Muslim opinion and sided with the alien rulers.

*10th November 1942:* Two or three days ago Syed Mahmud, who is not so well and whose mind is greatly exercised by the repeated failures to solve the communal deadlock, put me a simple question. "What", he asked me, "would you do if you were Jinnah?", meaning one in Jinnah's position. I was engrossed in a very interesting book at the time and I returned a reply designed to discourage a lengthy discussion. But later I could not help thinking that it was a pertinent question.

Jinnah occupies a remarkable position in Indian politics today, irrespective of the route by which he has travelled. He can secure from political parties the best of terms for the Indian Muslims if only he is prepared to say : "I will fight for India's freedom alongside the most advanced party, provided the Muslims are not denied the right to order their lives in accordance with their own notion of their freedom in every sphere of life." He calls it self-determination, and how can one be against self-determination?

*17th February 1943:* Gandhiji's 21-day fast, which has entered the eighth day, seems to have left the Mahasabha and Jinnah unmoved. The first is afraid that the fast may result in a Hindu-Muslim agreement to the prejudice of the Hindus. Jinnah, for his part, is not concerned with the 'Hindu' All Parties' Conference and deprecates fasting to solve political problems. He finds in it an element of coercion. It must be presumed that when he talks of the revolt of "one hundred million Muslims of India" he means no coercion. Strange logic. It is amazing that without Hitler's armed force, Jinnah enjoys Hitler's power.

*14th March 1944:* Nothing is easier for me than to prove that Pakistan is most undesirable for India as a whole, and for the Indian Muslims. But if we refuse to have anything but the best, the situation may get worse. In this evolving world we have often to be content with the second or next best.

I am convinced on practical grounds that by far the best course for India as a whole is to follow the Soviet example in constitutional planning, with such modifications as may appear desirable. This means recognition of the principle of self-determination by homogeneous communities or national groups. It will mean a willing partnership by all, or by as many as see a clear community of interest in a confederal groupir.g. But there should be no forced union, for it will spell obstruction and internal weakness. If there has to be a Pakistan, a treaty will have to be negotiated by it with Hindustan. It should be a treaty stipulating political and commercial



collaboration for mutual benefit. I admit that the simple formula I have stated is capable of great elaboration, and it is not as simple as it looks. But, on the whole, it is the best I can think of.

*2nd July 1944:* Last night Jawaharlal and I, with Mahmud as a deeply interested listener, had a long discussion from 9.15 to about 12.30. This was the third sustained effort, since coming here, in which I attempted to understand his political position. I specially tackled him on the communal question. He is apt to get into long digressions in trying to set out his convictions. His talk and tone on these occasions become pontifical, and to one not accustomed to his ways, would be irritating. But a firm and polite reminder that he may assume the other party to be cognisant of what he presumes has to be explained, brings him back to a less elementary level of discourse. But certain persons and policies are like the red rag to him, and the very mention of them sends him into an unreasonable outburst of passion, expressed more in his tense face and look resembling that of a pugilist who prepares for a nasty punch. It is a pity. He is a fine fellow, and his calmer self is both charming and scrupulously honourable. But his passionate pugilism on some occasions gives one the impression of a proud and unreasoning victim of volcanic emotions.

The central point I raised was: How could the communal tangle be denied, and what was its solution, if not the one proposed by Jinnah? Could any political progress be made without solving this question?

Jawaharlal criticised the League's idea of 'self-determination' on the ground that it was nebulous and undefined. He was frankly not hopeful of any deal with Jinnah, who he thought was not aware of the world forces and economic developments which were making for a structure of society totally different from the one he seemed to have in view. The League, Jawaharlal thought, has a feudal outlook and so on. But so had many Hindus.

Jawaharlal made it clear, in the end, that the big economic plan by which he intended to tackle the problem of India's poverty would not be realisable if the communal tangle continued to come in the way. And therefore he would rather agree, of course unwillingly, to let the Muslims separate where they could. He would then have a strong central government in the rest of India, and proceed with his economic programme.

At the end of the discussion it was clear to me that the difficulty which the British were pointing out--apart from the fact that it suited the imperialists--was not a figment. It needs to be faced and overcome.

*14th July 1944:* I happened to look over my notes of 14th March. It is a curious coincidence that while C.R. was carrying on negotiations with Jinnah about the communal formula in Delhi, I was penning my notes here suggesting a settlement along the lines of C.R.'s formula! Is not there some unseen wave of thoughts which strike several minds at the same time? This

possibility has occurred to me from time to time. I have a vague belief that thoughts, like radio waves, float in the atmosphere and if your mind is tuned you cannot help picking up thought waves and tapping them out. I may cite another example: the simultaneous occurrence of certain ideas in the Aga Khan's palace and here, to Gandhiji and to me. Here they were urged by me and defeated. But Gandhiji, being unhampered, carried them out. He joined issue with the authorities on the charges which I felt should not be allowed to remain unrefuted. But here a majority believed in sulking and indignant silence.

*4th August 1944:* A positive feature of the India debate in the Commons is the statement on behalf of the British Government that the Cripps offer stands in its entirety. And Jinnah has responded to Gandhiji's suggestion for a meeting by agreeing to 'receive' him at his (Jinnah's) residence in Bombay. Meanwhile C.R. is going hot and strong. While urging the Government not to lose this opportunity of solving the deadlock, he challenges critics to produce a satisfactory alternative formula on the communal question.

Alas! These steps in March 1942 would have borne good fruit; and by now we would have been on the high road to the realisation of all we wanted for India. But destiny is stronger than man's best efforts. Or, man condones his own shortcomings and errors by confessing defeat at the hands of destiny.

*15th August 1944:* Nobody can deny that a Hindu-Muslim settlement is a prerequisite to an Indo-British settlement--unless a colossal revolution sweeps aside foreign rule. Even the nationalist Muslims are now for accepting the right of secession.

I have an alternative formula. Let India as a whole be looked upon as a 'Commonwealth' of peoples or nations. If the British Commonwealth can subsist and act together in spite of different sovereign political structures of the Dominions, why cannot India do the same? Surely, if independent Nepal and the sovereign native states can exist side by side and within the political system of the British Empire, they as well as other constituents, can do the same as distinct and sovereign structures within the political system of an Indian Commonwealth.

What, it may be asked, will be the binding force? Why, if the British Crown, which is a constitutional figment, can serve as a uniting bond, can't a Commonwealth of India be sustained by a pan-Indian patriotism as a voluntary binding factor? Or let treaties be concluded and observed in good faith by the constituents of the proposed Indian Commonwealth.

If, on the other hand, it is feared that the Muslim units will be unreliable, why, they will only be a source of weakness and danger if they are held together by force.

It is true that economic planning on an India-wide scale, and Defence, will

require much closer cooperation than the sovereignty of the parts of an Indian Commonwealth may entitle one to presume. But surely, if the British Empire could devise means of common defence and economic preferences, so can an Indian Commonwealth.

All this can happen, given goodwill and mutual trust and recognition of larger common interests. It is a pity that our statesmen and politicians think in no terms other than what they have been taught by their rulers to employ. They talk in terms of choice only between federation and partition. The logic which appeals to controversialists is the destructive-analytical, not the constructive-synthetic. I feel tired of agitators and logicians.

*29th September 1944:* Last evening Superintendent Sendak came round with a grave expression and told us that he had heard on the radio a B.B.C. report on the breakdown of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks. I kept a straight countenance, and so did Jawaharlal and Maulana who were nearby. But I felt as if the heavens had come toppling about the ears. The gathering clouds in the evening sky had rendered the murky atmosphere the very image of my mood. All was lost, I told myself.

My thoughts turned to Rene, and I prayed for her deep down in my soul. Suddenly an ironical thought invaded my devotional spirit: "But did I not pray for the success of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks as earnestly? What is the use?" I chased this thought back to its dark lair. Then I got up for a walk to sweat the depression out. Pant and Vallabhbhai were already walking, and discussing the breakdown in grave but low tones. I joined them and we walked around the quadrangle almost like people returning from a funeral. I came back to my room, and after half an hour of brooding took up for distraction a book to read.

I have done what I can to help in straightening out the messy situation in the country which is mine by the accident of birth. Supposing I had been born an Englishman or Russian or an American or a Negro? If not this, I would have found myself in some other mess. It is meaningless to go on brooding over failures beyond your control. And yet can we help it?

The newspapers delivered today give the full text of the Gandhi-Jinnah correspondence between the 9th and 25th September. It makes sad reading. They began wrongly and ended wrongly. Gandhiji could not get away from his habit of falling back on bare abstractions when he is confronted by concrete difficulties. He is a fine fighter but no architect. Neither of them was temperamentally fit to negotiate with the other. They met only to search each other's hearts and not to give and take. The tragedy is sealed, I fear.

They fenced like protagonists of parallel hallucinations--yes, both of them. Why could they not picture India as a Commonwealth of Sovereign States within a loose and voluntary political system (not Union or Federation) like the British Commonwealth? It is not an inconceivable pos-

sibility, if we look at Canada and South Africa which are so different, and sovereign, and are yet in the same Commonwealth.

*4th October 1944:* Indian newspapers in general do not appear to have viewed the failure of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks as anything like the tragedy it is. They regret and deplore it mildly, and some papers evince a sense of relief! Muslim League organs blame Gandhiji, and vice versa.

Blind sentiment rooted in history seems to have proved too strong for a confident and united bid for freedom. Perhaps not until Hindustan and Pakistan have actually worked as free countries for some time will either Hindus or Muslims and others begin to see things in proper perspective. If so, well, let even a divided India begin to function as a cooperative commonwealth of sovereign states.

## NOTES

1. The resolution on self-determination said: "It is absolutely and urgently necessary, in the best interests of the country at this hour of peril to do all that the Congress can possibly do to remove every obstacle in the way of the establishment of a national administration to face the present situation. Inasmuch as the Muslim League has insisted on the recognition of the right of separation of certain areas from united India upon the ascertainment of the wishes of the people of such areas, as a condition precedent for a united national action, this party is of opinion and recommends to the All India Congress Committee that to sacrifice the chances of the formation of a national government at this grave crisis for the doubtful advantage of maintaining a controversy over the unity of India is a most unwise policy. It has become necessary to choose the lesser evil and acknowledge the Muslim League's claim for separation, should the same be persisted in when the time comes for framing a constitution for India, and thereby remove all doubts and fears in this regard; and to invite the Muslim League for a consultation for the purpose of arriving at an agreement and securing the installation of a national government to meet the present emergency."
2. Wife of B. Shiva Rao, journalist and a nationalist from the days of Annie Besant's Home Rule League.
3. K.F. Nariman, prominent Congressman of Bombay.
4. Jugal Kishore Khanna.
5. Son of the Congress leader Bhulabhai Desai.
6. Daughter of Sardar Patel.
7. Asaf Ali was not aware of the several letters addressed by Gandhiji to the Government, since they were not made public till much later. Gandhiji deplored the violent expression of popular indignation following the arrest of national leaders in August 1942 but held the Government to blame in the first place for its own lionine violence.
8. Pet name of Purnima Banerji, younger sister of Aruna Asaf Ali.

## 8. Barrack Life and Reflections

Presented in the first section of this chapter are the more personal of the entries in Asaf Ali's Prison Diary at Ahmadnagar, reflecting the deep anxiety he felt for his wife who, with a prize announced by the police for her capture, was among the prominent leaders of the underground 'Quit India' movement. He admires her courage and patriotism even while disagreeing with the method.

The second section covers the comments he offered, at Jawaharlal Nehru's invitation, on the Ms. of *The Discovery of India*. Nehru acknowledges in the Preface to the work, which he wrote in Ahmadnagar Fort Prison during 1944, his indebtedness to his eleven companions for the benefit of discussions on various aspects of Indian history and culture. Nehru says in the course of his Prison Diary that he read out the Ms. to Maulana Azad, who offered comments within the scope of what had been written, while Asaf Ali brought up larger and basic issues. Wartime shortage of paper is reflected in the close writing on both sides of thin strips of brown paper on which Asaf Ali put down his extensive comments, discussion of which brought the two men closer.

Intimate pen pictures of Gandhiji and of four fellow-detenus--Nehru, Azad, Patel and Mahmud--form the third section.

### Aruna and the Underground

*6th September 1942:* When Govind Ballabh Pant joined us at Ahmadnagar he brought the news that Rene had spoken at the public meeting that was to have been addressed by Maulana and Jawahar, and had hoisted the Congress flag. He also brought the news that the meeting was dispersed with tear-gas bombs, and many persons were injured and arrested. This made me most anxious about Rene. The anguish of suspense lasted nearly three weeks till I received a brief note from her which she wrote on the 21st and which was delivered to me on the 27th after it had been duly scrutinised by the Home Department of the Bombay Government. But the suspense recommenced very soon with the arrival of the newspapers the

next day. They carried the report that a notice had been affixed on our house requiring Rene to surrender within a month. Her last postcard (no address) shows that she is still free.

*8th September 1942:* Wonder of wonders! For the first time in 14 years I nearly forgot the 5th September, our wedding anniversary. I was thinking of it often enough before the 5th, and I became aware of the lapse last night as I lay awake in my bed till long after all the others had switched off their lights. And it pained me to think that Rene must have missed some token from me. Every time we have not been together in Delhi on the anniversary, we have reminded each other by telegram of what to us was a day of destiny. Although it is not one of the the major calamities of this universe, the oversight marks a breakdown of a hallowed tradition of our personal life--of which so little is left to us in the stormy political weather in which we have been living.

So I have written today to Rene, but it is nothing like my usual letters for I had to skate on thin ice. I could not even say where I was writing from, except 'somewhere on this globe'. Ridiculous. They seem to set great store by being mysterious about the place of our detention, even more than on winning a battle on any of the war fronts. I am certain that this folly, after the initial blunder of precipitating an avoidable situation, has added much to the fire of the people's indignation. The mysterious spiriting away of us in the morning dusk to an unknown destination must have lent itself to a crop of blood-curdling rumours.

*20th September 1942:* Among the back numbers of the *Bombay Chronicle*, now given to us, there was one issue, dated the 22nd August, which contained an item of news in italics, with the headline 'Asaf Ali very much alive'. It caught Jawaharlal Nehru's eye first. At lunch time, as I walked into the mess room, he laughed and said: "Asaf, there is a report in the papers that you were dead. I think it is an exaggeration. The government had to issue a communique about it." I was a bit late, and not knowing what it was about, replied in a bantering tone: "I am afraid it is a bit premature, in any case." Later on I saw the communique which was dated the 20th August. It said: "It is now definitely learnt that Mr. Asaf Ali's relatives have received news that he is hale and hearty, and the rumour of his death, which was sedulously propagated yesterday, is consequently a malicious falsehood."

Heavens knows how this rumour originated, but it must have caused a good deal of stir in Delhi, and pain to my friends and relatives. It is obvious that the Government felt compelled to contradict the rumour: otherwise they may have had to confront another upheaval. Dear Delhi--after all they reciprocate my love, and appreciate the fact that I have given them the best portion of my life.

I wonder whether Rene had reached Delhi by that time, and whether she was also given this 'news'. What she must have gone through is beyond my imagination--even if it was only for a few hours. Of course some day it is bound to be--and I hate to think what Rene may have to face. I have full confidence in her firm, confident and resolute will. She is equal to any situation in life. But it hurts me to think that she may have to rough it. With constant setbacks and heavy sacrifices, which are concomitants of the kind of public life permitted in a subject country, it has not been possible for me to build up sufficient reserves for Rene's future. She, however, would resent such an observation as a reflection on her self-reliance--which it is not. It only expresses my desire to be of service to her. I cannot repay her in any way adequately. As a friend, comrade and companion she has proved to be my ideal--and that is saying a great deal. I had to wait for about twenty years of conscious life before making my final choice.

But how did this rumour originate? Perhaps from the mystery about our whereabouts, and the news of Mahadev Desai's death. Instead of intimidating, this stupidly devised secrecy about the place of our detention must have enraged the people and raised all sorts of doubts in their minds. Quite possibly they were led to believe that the Government had either done us to death, or transported us.

*29th September 1942:* They have admitted that on five occasions they machine-gunned 'mobs' from the air--in Bihar and Bengal. And they have the audacity to declare to the world that the Nazis are the worst barbarians! The debates in the Central Assembly and the Council of State have stripped the Indian puppets, of the Executive Council, bare to the bone. The historic eleven are well symbolised by the Delhi potter who, it is reported in the newspapers, has applied for the restoration of his "eleven donkeys" hired by someone and later seized by the Delhi Police because they graced a public procession.

In spite of the repression, Delhi cannot be subdued to the point of losing its humour. I can well imagine the eleven gaily caparisoned donkeys proceeding in solemn procession, to symbolise the eleven asses of the Viceroy's Executive Council. The police promptly seized the offending donkeys and impounded them!

*3rd October 1942:* For three days I have read very little and written nothing. The reason is that while playing badminton, my partner (Pant) happened to strike the shuttle with a sweep, just behind me. Anticipating the stroke I ducked, and received the blow under my right eye, the rim of the bat hitting me on the right cheek bone. Fortunately the glasses were not broken. I did not take notice of the injury at the time and played on, in spite of the eye watering and the bruised face hurting me. Two days

after, acute conjunctivitis set in.

On the 30th of September I had a letter from Rene, and almost immediately afterwards read the newspaper report that they had declared her an absconder and her "belongings forfeited". I was terribly annoyed by the description of her as 'absconder'. But perhaps it cannot be helped. She knows the conditions best. To me it appears that it would hurt her dignity to give herself up.

They are in authority, entrenched behind military power, maintained with our money and our men! Those who feel that the foreigners' decrees and orders should be treated with contempt are fully justified, provided they themselves have the capacity to organise the people into an ordered society. I suppose they are fully convinced that they are entrenched within the citadel of the people's affection and can organise them by their own willing consent into an autonomous society of men and women. It is, therefore, not the 'fear of consequences' which keeps them from facing the police and the courts, or the prisons, of the foreigner; it is their passionate desire to build up the people's strength to resist the internal and the external enemy--the foreigner and his henchmen within the country, and those who hope to invade India and step into the former's shoes. From this point of view, it is both dignified and honourable for Rene, and others who are in a similar position, to treat the foreigner's orders and decrees with contempt. But since those in authority are trying their damndest best to prejudice us in the eyes of an easily gullible world, I would regard it as more appropriate for Rene to come right out into the open and challenge the validity and morality of their infamous orders, and go behind the prison bars after exposing the iniquity of the rulers.

Anyway, I think all underground activities are, in the very nature of things, demoralising: for they proceed on the basis of avoiding the consequences (not in a narrow personal and selfish sense) of open action. I am convinced that absolute honesty and sincerity of purpose cannot fail to win approbation, and it needs no cloaks and masks. Rene, I am sure, has gone underground only to be spared from being rendered inoperative. From a selfish point of view, I don't like it; it causes me many sleepless hours and intense anxiety. However, from a larger point of view, when I remind myself that she is doing what she thinks is best for the country and the people, I cannot but feel proud of her.

*21st October 1942:* No letter from Rene yet! But a note from Jugal Kishore Khanna dated the 5th was handed to me two days ago. Though brief, it was welcome. He has signed himself illegibly but as 'your younger brother', and therefore the Censor has, in his perplexity I suppose, decided to let it come through. The note is in Urdu, and characteristically revealing in its double entendre. The situation is the same as before, the note says: "Delhi has not cooled down. There is no change in the climate. Business



is as usual." He also hints that it was necessary for them not to surrender if the pot was to be kept boiling. I do admire the tenacity and loyalty of Khanna; and I admire Rene's deliberate 'roughing it'. But it does not release my anxiety and concern about her.

I don't propose to write to Rene now until the receipt of previous letters is confirmed. If my letters do not reach her at all, it is love's labour lost.

*27th October 1942:* Yesterday evening Major Sendak showed me the Bombay Government's reply to his inquiry, at my instance, about Rene's letters which I felt sure were being impounded. It said that four of her letters--received during the past four or five weeks, I presume--have been forwarded to the Chief Commissioner of Delhi "as she is evading arrest"! I lost my temper and told Sendak that it was pure and simple sadism. Did they think that correspondence between husband and wife would blow the British empire to pieces? I added that I wished it would. I also said hard things about the officials who were behaving like pānic-stricken fools.

Today I have received *The Grey Eminence* (Aldous Huxley) from Siva Rao, and a huge parcel of umpteen things 'from Afzal Beg'. Of course these must be from Rene--biscuits, dry fruits, all sorts of sweets, pastilles, scents, honey, marmalade, etc. I have got a whole shop here. I have retained a few sweets and toilet things, and distributed the rest.

*14th November 1942:* I had a letter from Babloo<sup>1</sup> the day before yesterday--from Delhi--dated the 5th. He has assured me that Kulsum Zamani is 'very well'. This is Rene's wedding name, which has come in handy after more than 14 years as a domestic code.

I imagine Rene is somewhere in New Delhi. Probably living, *sub rosa*, with her brother and mother. Such is the result of foreign rule. Those who love liberty must either live as prisoners, or like moles and foxes underground. Freedom of the spirit is inconsistent with freedom of the person in a subject country.

*16th November 1942:* I have replied to Babloo very briefly. Towards the end of the letter I have said: "My love to Kulsum. It is time she went to school to learn kindergarten scrawl; if only to write, How do you do?" I forgot that they are withholding her letters.

I wish Rene had gone to prison. It would have meant much more rest than she can enjoy outside; and it would have set me at rest too. Isn't it curious that I, who want with all my heart to see her free and happy, now wish to see her in gaol? I am all the time afraid that they will implicate Rene in some serious charge, if only to prove their contention that responsible Congressmen and women are encouraging violence.

*21st November 1942 :* I fear that Rene has come to Bombay, where they are hot on the trail of all those believed to be behind the scenes.

Who can restrain those who feel justified in adopting any course, violent or non-violent, for securing the freedom of their country? I for one would

hold it fully admissible to resort to organised violence on a national scale for the establishment of a country's freedom, but only if there was a reasonable chance of success. Prudence dictated the course of non-violence 22 years ago, and the circumstances that now prevail, during the war, make it even more imperative.

*22nd November 1942* : Sucheta has written to Kripalani that Rene (whom she refers to as Sonny's<sup>2</sup> sister) is worried and tired. Heaven knows what discomforts she is enduring as the price of defying her persecutors.

Persecution is the oldest instrument of foreign conquerors and indigenous tyrants. But persecution has never paid, and never shall pay: for human conscience cannot be snuffed out. Brute force does prove effective for a time, but not for all time. It blunts the edge of sensibility in the tyrant, but at the same time sharpens the swords of nemesis.

*23rd November 1942* : After the fullest consideration, and in consultation with Maulana, I have written to Babloo today to have it conveyed to Rene that the dignity of her position demands that the Government should not be able to say she is 'evading arrest'. She should therefore voluntarily surrender herself for arrest and detention.

*4th December 1942* : In reply to my protest to Maxwell against the blocking of my correspondence with Rene, Richard Tottenham has sent a laconic reply: "Such instructions are being issued as seem to be necessary."

*7th December 1942*: I was shown a letter from Krishna Kripalani<sup>3</sup> from Bombay dated the 1st December. He is a dear affectionate fellow, and level-headed. I had to return the letter, because he is not included in the official list of 'near' or 'immediate' relations. It was a matter of grace and discreet accommodation that the Superintendent showed it to me. Krishna has given me news of Rene: "I have met Babloo's sister." I wonder if the Censor is left in the dark by this formula, or deliberately winks at it. Anyway, Krishna's letter was doubly welcome on account of the reassurance of Rene's safety.

*14th December 1942*: Two of Rene's 'numerous letters', as she puts it, have been delivered to me. I think this is the first instalment of the result of the instructions which Tottenham said the Government were issuing. So far so good.

Seeing Rene's handwriting was almost like travelling home after a long absence and seeing her at the railway station. How I used to crane my neck out to catch a glimpse of her, waiting to wave to me. And then I devoured the letters.

The nobility of her soul would not let her submit to the order calling upon her to surrender, on pain of forfeiture of her property. She refused to be bullied. Quite right too. They don't seem to realise that threats cannot bend the will of the self-respecting.

**2nd January 1943 :** I have not felt so terribly down in the dumps during the past five months as today. Quite suddenly, about midday, I collapsed into the deepest mental depression--and imagined all sorts of horrible things happening to Rene. Even after a couple of hours during which I tried to rest and calm down, I was still a lost soul. And then I addressed the Controller within, and begged him to pull me up.

A deliberately active game of badminton, to which I was summoned at 4.30 p.m., sweated the 'blues' out, and I am now much better.

**8th January 1943 :** Yesterday I received an Urdu letter from 'Kulsum Zamani', written on the 8th of last month!

She has either bobbed or Eton-cropped her hair, so she says through an artful complaint skilfully put into a friend's mouth. I was most agreeably surprised to receive the letter, and pained on reading it. She is intensely active, legitimately proud of her achievements, but emotionally tense and almost morbid and tragic. For me this is indication enough that underground life is robbing her of peace and rest.

How angry I was with myself. Here we are, calmly pursuing a peaceful life while one who is my dearest being is piloting a rudderless bark amid high breakers and rocky shoals. I could not restrain myself, and went and showed the letter to Maulana. He was moved, and came round after a while and stayed in my room for a couple of hours, trying to assuage my feelings.

**10th January 1943 :** For three days I have wanted to write to Rene, but each time I started to write I tore it up. I do not know how to contact Rene, and not the over-zealous political stranger who has dominated her mind and activities during these five months.

Once an idea has caught her imagination, she rides it to gallop until the tired steed has to be discarded, or put to rest. First, the social pony of Saraswati Bhawan,<sup>4</sup> trained to perfection, fell from favour. And Irwin College took its place. Then Irwin College faded out, and the Women's Conference succeeded. One day the Women's Conference was abandoned and journalism followed as the next quarry, and serious study filled her hours. But the political bias swelled all the time to the point of flood. And now I find that Gandhian politics has invaded and conquered her imagination. The governing passion of the time claims all her energy and time. She is noble to the roots of her soul, and whatever she touches becomes the dedicated devotee's sacred tabernacle.

I suppose her early convent training has given a 'devotional' bias to all her efforts. I can't help admiring even her extravagances.

**22nd January 1943 :** A postcard from Delhi dated the 12th says that they have announced a reward for information leading to the arrest of the Delhi 'absconders'. I take it that this includes Rene. News after news about the recovery of explosives, etc., from Delhi, and now the Explosives Ordinance enhancing the sentence to capital punishment. I know, and feel

perfectly certain, that Rene will never go near violence, but how can I be certain that the persecutors will not try to implicate her in some dire offence? I would not mind in the least if I were involved in the most serious charge, and were to suffer the penalty, but the mere apprehension of such a nature touching Rene affects me so terribly that I become morbidly melancholy. How I wish Rene had surrendered in the beginning, and not been carried away into wholly unwarranted heroics.

*23rd January 1943* : Alas! Rene will never realise, in the present flood of her innocent and emotional elation, how I have suffered on the score of her risks. I can see from this distance how she is running like a somnambulist on the edge of a precipice. Since yesterday's news I have been on the rack of anxiety and it has reduced me to pulp--physically unfit for normal life. I am as depressed, and look as aged, as a man in the grip of some fell disease. This is the first time that mental torment has so palpably told on my physical self.

Rene must have worked herself up, as she always does, to the highest pitch of Satyagraha zeal for her plan to deliver India from bondage, even as Joan of Arc did in the case of her motherland. But the mental faggots are for me, to begin with, and who knows what else is in store for both. At times I feel that I shall never see her again, for before the end of this incarceration something terrible--heart failure--may happen to me.

*25th January 1943* : I have tried hard to relax my mental tension about Rene. Why should some human beings be so consumed by their emotional attachment? After all she is a separate unit of intelligence, with an individuality not in any way so bound up with me as to abandon her own personal inclination for my sake. And I any case, when I am dead and gone she will have to carry the burden of life in her own way. The shadow of my almost selfish love should not cross her path and prevent or eclipse her self-expression in any way. And yet, not being able to help my own nature, I continue to suffer mutely.

Sublimate it? Sublimate to which level? Nothing short of the universal, as in my poems that seek to touch the furthest confines of the Infinite-Eternal. Or in the flowers and song-birds, butterflies, and the tints and delicately nuanced hues of sunrise and sunset that fill me with tenderness, like the most sensitive love.

*26th January 1943* : I am physically somewhat better today, after more than 36 hours of lying in bed. And yet the doctor could detect nothing! So, Rene, if ever you happen to discover these notes, you will know that mental pain can prostrate one even more than bodily pain. And yet, instead of finding fault with you I am filled with admiration. Perhaps you are better fitted for life's tough challenge than I am. You once wrote and said: "One has to steel one's heart".

*13th February 1943* : Yesterday the newspapers brought in the concluding

portion of the Government's communique. In a letter of the 5th February to Gandhiji, Lord Linlithgow while trying to prove that the Congress was responsible for the mob violence and other crimes, says that "even now there is an underground organisation, in which the wife of a member of the Working Committee plays a prominent part." Then he says that this organisation "is actively engaged in planning bomb outrages and other acts of terrorism."

I could barely manage to read through this, and my mind stood stunned. Of course it does not necessarily mean that the reference is to Rene. She will never, never knowingly associate herself with any such thing.

My mind was unprepared for this blow--even though for weeks and weeks past I had an ominous feeling that they would do their utmost to implicate her in some serious offence. My foreboding has at last come true and knocked me on the head. I know she is innocent. My heart tells me that it is a frame-up, or in the last resort she has unknowingly and certainly not deliberately, got associated with some persons who, while pretending to her that they are scrupulously adhering to the Congress creed, have possibly gone and indulged in terroristic acts. I shall say nothing against honest but foolish patriots acting that way. But I cannot bring myself to believe Rene would associate herself with such persons.

She has served four terms in prison (nearly four years out of the less than 15 years of our married life) as a Satyagrahi. I cannot stand the idea that her name should be associated with the terrorism of those who have allowed really stupid things to be done, and that she should suffer for that. The government are in a savage mood, and God knows what they propose to do. I do most earnestly pray that I may succumb to my heart condition before she comes to any harm.

After all, I am a true Pygmalion, and she the true Galatee. I was 40, a well known lawyer and not an unknown politician, and one who had seen a great deal of the world, when I met her, a frail but beautiful girl of 19, with sensitive eyes and a longing for knowledge although just fresh from her convent school and almost imbued with Christian instruction. She was an idealist, and like idealists endowed with a distinct personality and an unbending will. I realised in a moment that she was the person I had waited for all the years.

Our correspondence during the days of courtship fills a sizeable box. How we probed each other's mind, and how I filled her with such choice delicacies of the spirit as I hoped she would appreciate. For fifteen years we have lived together, until lately I her mentor and she my apt though not uncritical follower. After the second imprisonment of 1932, she began to take in much individually, and her mind began to expand and blossom in its own personal climate. How well she came out intellectually, and with a tall, commanding moral stature, was proved by her compelling

personality as recognised by her elders among both men and women. An indefatigable and voracious pursuer of knowledge, a single-minded activist who could put life into dead bones, a creative genius who brought to life anything she touched. Well! But I was her creator--a pardonable pride--and her tactful preceptor. In latter years we began to develop by critical contacts and mental repercussions on each other. And she became quite as much my preceptor as I was hers.

But I still flatter myself to think, without meaning any the slightest reflection on her individuality and originality, that I am her leader in every matter, and therefore whatever she does in life, whether after consulting me or otherwise, I am primarily and finally responsible. I have, therefore, in anticipation of a trial, should the persecutors launch one against her, prepared a draft letter requesting Government to allow me to be present at her trial whether as her counsel and husband, or better still as a co-accused to overcome the difficulties of bureaucratic procedure. I have also offered to defray the expenses of my transfer etc. My whole object is to be with Rene, should she become the victim of Government's policy of tarring and besmearing us to save their own face. If it is to be a long imprisonment, I wish to share it, even voluntarily allowing the judgement to go against me.

*15th February 1943, 6 a.m.* : The darkness of the night is rolling away and the eastern horizon is slowly turning grey and bluish white by turns. I had a better night.

The more I think about it the more certain I feel that Rene is not the object of this dark allusion. I feel certain that she could not have allowed herself knowingly to be associated with any body of persons who may be responsible for the stupidities reported from the Bombay Presidency. And in any case how could she possibly be connected, from all that distance in Delhi, with those persons in Bombay?

Oh! I must not forget to note that I have found Jawahar the very soul of nobility and genuineness of heart. Immediately after reading the government communique he came to me, and finding me deep in thought wondered whether the oblique reference to the wife etc. had affected me. He added with feeling that he could not imagine Rene doing or associating herself with anything so silly. I was grateful to him for the transparently genuine estimate of Rene and for his deeply felt sympathy.

*16th February 1943* : Could it have been Rene's brilliant idea to give currency to the description of the Viceroy's executive councillors as 'the eleven donkeys'? It must have annoyed the government and, I dare say, Maxwell in particular.

Rene must have become their *bete noir*. During the last movement, of 1940, she resigned from Lady Linlithgow's Red Cross Committee, and in 1941 turned down her invitation to organise women for Air Raid Precau-

tions. And, of course, she refused to surrender this time.

**1st March 1943:** My imagination, always prolific, has become my tormentor. I used to picture all sorts of tragic mishaps when Rene would get late, if she happened to be driving her car herself. And now, what horrors of hardships in her exile have occurred to me.

Only now have I realised how deeply I love Rene, not just her physical self but her, pure and simple. My love for her is the love of a parent, brother, friend and lover all rolled together.

**11th May 1943 :** The inevitable milestone is reached today. I have completed 55 years. Had a letter from 'Nasrat' and two books. Really my darling is astonishingly resourceful. She has managed to send these to reach me on my birthday.

What a birthday, indeed! Yesterday it was reported that the case against Rene was taken up on 8th May and she was tried *in absentia* for disobeying the Chief Commissioner's order to present herself on September 7th last before the Police Superintendent. It was this order which put Rene's back up and she refused to surrender. And now she has braved nine months of exile with its risks and hardships.

As my eye caught her name in the *Chronicle* yesterday, my heart stood still for the moment, and a disagreeable sensation passed over me. I have become so hypersensitive about Rene. This has made me a phenomenon at once pitiable and disgusting. Maulana and Jawahar have hinted that I should exercise my will and pull myself together. It was humiliating. And yet, despite every effort, I fail to get over it. The Viceroy's dark allusion--if the reference was not to Sucheta but to Rene--was a shattering shock to my nerves, and I have not recovered from it. What can I say this birthday, in this state of mind?

**1st June 1943:** I have heard from 'Nasrat' again. She is shocked by my despondency and bitter pessimism. She says: "I thought you were one of the few persons alive, evolved and integrated." Further, she conveys to me the conclusion of an 'academic' debate, that tyranny whether dictated by love or hate is bad, and it is the personal right of an individual to be free to travel to the furthest limit of one's individuality. How my own teachings and views come home to roost!

Babloo says in one of his letters, pleading passionately for my blessing for his projected marriage with his cousin Phutoo<sup>5</sup>. "Now I can tell you that you need not worry. Nothing has happened that should alarm you." I take it that he is referring to Rene. Since the receipt of these letters I have felt a bit relieved. And my body too has registered improvement. During this week I have regained nearly two pounds of the 16 pounds of weight lost by me.

**13th June 1943 :** Babloo has got married to his cousin Phutoo on the 29th in Delhi. They married as Muslims!

I have so much to say (for I feel and think so much), but somehow I don't seem to have regained mastery of either the mind or the nerves so far, and all my mental energy is exhausted day after day and hour after hour in thinking of Rene and praying for her. Yes, the mind in its helplessness is reduced to praying.

*17th June 1943* : Have had letters from Babloo and Kulsum Zamani. Babloo is married, and too happy to think of anything. Kulsum's letter is reassuring, and yet there is in it a note which disturbs me. Apparently she is disappointed that I am officiously anxious about her. But so long as she remains the 'hawk-hunted nightingale' I can have no rest of mind.

*28th July 1943* : Kulsum left for Calcutta after some weeks in Bombay, it seems. For nearly two months she has been in Bengal. I had a letter from Nandita to this effect. Then came a letter from Kulsum from Curseong. Thank God she has gone out of the plains and is now in the hills. I have passed a comparatively less worried time this month.

*9th August 1943* : So today is the first day of the second year of detention. For me than half of the year has been a period of the gloomiest anxiety. Rene has reassured me in various ways, from time to time, and it has occasionally relieved me. But somehow I have not been able to regain my balance, physical or mental. If only I am spared to see her again.

*29th August 1943* : Full 20 days have gone by and I have not put in a word. The truth is that for months the entire rhythm of my life has been disrupted. I am like a plant whose roots have been pulled out of its soil.

*12th November 1943* : I had a letter (very brief) from 'Nasrat' three days ago. She has been ill. God knows how and under what circumstances she is living.

*6th December 1943* : There was a letter from Nandita three days ago. It was very welcome, for it gave me news of Rene. Nandita says: "Nasrat has lost his job, and has been here (Calcutta)."

*11th December 1943*: I was looking at the pages of the notebooks of these jottings. I had written nearly 300 pages from August to 14th December 1942, and during all of the past year I have barely written 154 pages. I appear a different man to myself. Am I going crazy? Nonsense. I am as fully in possession of my senses as ever. But I have become so obsessed with anxiety for Rene that my interest in life has shrunk to just one point. Just now news has come through that Jugal Kishore has been sentenced to three years' rigorous imprisonment for (1) disobeying the Chief Commissioner's order and (2) writing a reply to Government's pamphlet on 'Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances'. Three years! Rene may get a similar sentence. It means that, even if set at liberty, I shall have to undergo further separation and mental agony. Unless there is a settlement which includes a 'clean slate', her imprisonment may begin when others end theirs.



**22nd December 1943:** I have received an interesting letter from Rene, from Delhi. It has to a certain extent calmed my anxieties. But it has made me think, and think hard. She has taken me to task, and has asked me to be my "brave and courageous self", and "the beacon that you have been". There is a reference to two generations, mine and hers, and the difference of outlook. If so, instead of a beacon, I must be a stumbling block.

**30th December 1943 :** On the whole it has been the worst year of my life.

**9th January 1944:** My mother-in-law is, alas, stricken with cancer and, pending the inevitable, is going through agony. What it must mean to Rene! She cannot be with her mother to nurse her. Then, Norah is suffering from tubercular glands and is running temperature. And Rene, who is fonder of her than ordinary sisters are, cannot be near her. My uncle, too, who is old, is rapidly going downhill.

And yet in these last three weeks I have, with a supreme effort of the will to live, tried to pull myself together. I have begun to interest myself in books, and have improved physically too.

**22nd January 1944 :** The newspapers carry a news item about Rene's Baby Austin being auctioned for Rs.3,500 because she has been declared an absconder. Probably they will auction the house too. I don't care what they do to the property so long as they leave her alone. Patriotism is a virtue all over the world, but a crime in India!

**13th February 1944 :** I have now more or less reconciled myself to the possibility of my leaving Rene without any provision for life, except the residential house with its annexe. But it can hardly be called 'provision for life'. I am thankful to God that Rene is not a helpless person like most other women, and will do something to help herself. But it does not console me. Like so many others who have been active in public life, I have suffered, and now Rene is suffering, and God alone knows whether all this will bear the fruit for the coming generations for which we have struggled. When I read history and see that the most colossal sufferings go in vain--not sometimes but often and often--I begin to wonder whether Nature's laws, or God's laws, are what we believe they should be.

**19th March 1944 :** Today's *Sunday Chronicle* carried the news that "Mrs. Asaf Ali has been declared a proclaimed offender by the District Magistrate of Delhi in connection with writing and publishing prejudicial literature. In the course of the search of a house in Karol Bagh, a press and some manuscripts were recovered. And the writing of the manuscripts has been certified by the Government Examiner of Questioned Documents to be that of Mrs. Asaf Ali."

So there. I have felt for some time that something was amiss in connection with Rene. It is distressing. Who will benefit by this romantic patriotism? Can India get freedom through denunciations of the Government issued by the 'underground' press?

**15th April 1944:** A letter from Uncle Mujtaba has come in. He is going downhill, and T.B. has captured his granddaughters: little Akhter, and poor dear Gauhar. They are being treated, but Mamunjan's resources are very meagre. The house is a pen, and the entire surroundings so depressing.

It is a sin to have so many children without adequate means. Hence the need for a drastic change in the structure of society. Russia has certainly offered a good experimental model. There is hope for all in a communistic structure--if only the approach to that state is purged of needless suffering. It is a pity that such suffering is regarded by the exponents of communism as 'inevitable'.

The fact is that the existing social structures are all more or less vicious in their practical results--the theories notwithstanding. The Islamic social structure may be a half-way house in theory, but in actual practice it degenerates. This is how we find it today, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding.

**29th April 1944:** Poor dear Moshima (Rene's mother) passed away on the 26th. Two lines of an obituary notice in the *Leader* announced it, and I saw it yesterday. It was a heavy though not unexpected blow. How it must have affected Rene and Norah.

Moshima was a brave soul who faced life's trials and sorrows with courage. Who is infallible in the world? Her human weaknesses were, sympathetically considered, part of the charm of her life. Her affectionate nature was brimful of kindness, and bordered on what may be described as extravagance; for she often irritated her children by her overwhelming attention to the most trifling details concerning their lives. Yet she showed an amazing grasp of practical affairs, and proved a good and energetic manager of business. I had great respect for her tenacious nature, which helped her to manage her husband's Hotel, after his death. Had Sonny shown as much capacity, they could have made a great success of the hotelier's business.

Moshima's death was reported as the passing away of 'the mother of Mrs. Purnima Bannerjee and Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali'. She died as the proud mother of two of the most remarkable daughters of India. I may not say more.

**16th May 1944 :** Ten days have gone by since Gandhiji was released unconditionally, and all are left wondering what he means to do now. I am praying hard that Rene may be guided to seek his advice,<sup>6</sup> and terminate the long agony of my anxiety about her. He alone can talk her out of the tangle of self-imposed banishment and its trials.

Often I pour out my heart in long letters intended for Rene, and then consign them to the flames since I do not wish to subject my sacred thoughts and feelings to a public exhibition to the Censor. Perhaps my

preoccupation with Rene's safety is a failing of my character? But then, I say to myself : "No, my friend, you are only a cell in the body of universal being, and you are a love-cell. You cannot deny the law of your being. You cannot will it otherwise."

*21st May 1944* : Have heard from 'aunt Kulsum'. It appears that she saw Moshima before she died.

Rene has rebuked me soundly. She can't imagine why I torment my mind so much. Perhaps she is right. And perhaps she is annoyed because my letters in a way deepen her sense of responsibility for my anxiety. In any case, I must not write letters likely to annoy her on this point. She has become touchy, and with all the trouble and strain she has undergone, it is natural.

*19th June 1944* : It is surprising that Gandhiji has not advised Rene to surrender yet. Why, I wonder and ask myself in anguish.

*25th July 1944* : Although the writing of the autobiographical notes keep me occupied for hours each day, every now and then my mind leaps back to Rene--what is she occupied with, what is the state of her health, has she consulted or seen Gandhiji, etc. Sometimes I even wonder whether this long separation and the queer conditions of life she finds herself in will affect her mind in a manner which I cannot foresee, and in some way disturb the idyllic harmony of our lives. It oppresses me.

*27th July 1944* : I was overjoyed to get a parcel from 'Sonia Khan'. It contained a shawl, cigarettes (American 'Camel') and some scent (*khas*). It was obviously Rene's gift. Why has Rene sent me these things? It is such a waste, Rene darling. I have gone off scents--not that I don't like them. And the shawl is wholly superfluous. Cigarettes are welcome: but these are too strong for my throat.

*28th July 1944* : The newspapers report that Gandhiji has advised underground workers to surrender themselves, or rather to 'discover' themselves and run the open risk of being arrested. Surely Rene will heed the advice?

*15th August 1944* : I had a telegram from Dhiren<sup>7</sup> the day before yesterday, saying Rene now "intends joining the domestic science college". I hope this means ending underground life. Of course imprisonment will follow. But I am sure it will not continue beyond the war, which cannot now last for very long.

*27th August 1944* : Did I read too much into the 'domestic science college'? I have been scanning the papers, but so far Rene is still in purdah. God knows why she is hesitating.

*26th September 1944* : I had a telegram from 'Nasrat', from Firozabad. Id greetings! And a letter from Dhiren from Calcutta. It says: "Rene has inherited all the obduracy of her father." After Gandhiji's release I had felt a bit relieved, but this 'obduracy' is discouraging.

**4th October 1944** : Narendra Dev showed me a paragraph in the *Leader* of 30th September from 'A Special Correspondent'. It refers to Aruna as one of the rising stars, whose name is becoming popular for new babies. Even this does not assuage my pain. I may feel proud, but it does not hurt me the less to think what it has cost her, and I dare not think of what it may yet cost her.

**19th October 1944** : Apparently there is no hope of Rene 'discovering' herself. I had a postcard from Mahmood from Bombay to say: "Your niece's condition is not satisfactory. She has declined to go to the sanatorium. She is very obstinate, and has refused to listen to the family doctors."

And Nandita wrote from Santiniketan saying she had been to Calcutta where she found that : "Monica refuses to join her college. It is no use trying to persuade her." Nandita also says something about 'Sabina' having left her husband's home and not wanting ever to return. This has left me utterly shocked and miserable.

**19th November 1944** : A letter received today from Babloo shows that the New Delhi social set is fully occupied with its club life. He also draws a depressing picture of Kucha Chelan and the "unpleasant state of disrepair" in which he found the house. Natural. The shadows of the evening are gathering fast round me, too. Life on this planet is only what the eternal can reflect through the body. I know that the visible structures which house the eternal--I and also Rene--are destined to dissolution. I am dissolving rapidly.

**4th December 1944** : Many days have slipped by, and I have not been able to resume the thread of my autobiography. A gust of poetic afflatus disturbed my routine and the flow would not let me turn to other things. Three or four poems came into being in Urdu. Maulana heard them with obvious and repeatedly expressed appreciation. The titles and opening lines will show what they deal with. 'Torn Manuscripts' begins with : "Life holds the fragments of torn manuscripts, while new ones are being written every day." 'Sparks from Stone' says : "Rise up like a flame and burn out the scar of disappointments and sorrow; even stones when kicked emit scorching sparks." Then the 'Sightless Eye' asks the mind, "Oh, let me hear what colours grace your court. I know they pass in caravans through me." And so do all the senses question the mind. Even the lute and plectrum wonder what happens when strings thrill, to make men go into ecstasy. The mind itself wonders whether it is not a stage where messengers rest on the way to other realms.

**19th December 1944** : No news of Rene from anywhere. A thousand apprehensions fill my mind. I pray and pray, and that is all I can do.

This is the concluding paragraph of the last entry in Asaf Ali's prison diary at Ahmadnagar. He was shifted to a prison at Gurdaspur in Punjab, as part of

the dispersal of members of the Congress Working Committee, during March-April 1945, to or close to their home provinces preparatory to their release. Asaf Ali became so seriously ill at Gurdaspur jail that he was sent to Willingdon Nursing Home (now Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital) in New Delhi. Aruna managed to visit him there even though she was still underground. Gandhiji sent a telegram from Mahabaleshwar on 30th May 1945 to Asaf Ali: "Wire exact condition. Sorry you are ill." And he wrote from Panchgani on 4th June 1945 : "I do not like your being ill. But you are brave and you have still to serve the country. You will leave the sick-bed. Keep on sending me news through someone. May God make you well soon. I hope to remain here till the end of the month. Blessings from Bapu."

### A Shared Discovery of India

In the course of his comments on the Ms. of *The Discovery of India*, Asaf Ali describes as 'movingly human' the early chapter on Kamala. He says with reference to Nehru's reflections on the pouring of her ashes into the Ganges : "The Ganges for us is the highway to the eternal, through which or by which nearly the whole of India has voyaged for thousands of years. This is the celestial thread by which lie bound together uncounted generations of the past."

Many of Asaf Ali's comments show his knowledge and deep appreciation of India's ancient cultural heritage and chequered history. Reacting to Nehru's remarks (p. 213 of the *The Discovery*, O.U.P. reprint, 1983), on 'graven images', Asaf Ali writes: "I don't know why you say so. This would mean belittling the great poets who were constantly personifying and apostrophising even the natural phenomena. If Tvastri, the Vulcan of Heaven and if his daughter Sanjna and her stand-in or rather her double Chhaya, who were poetised as humans, lose their bodies or cannot be awakened out of stone or wood or cannot take shape in colours, I would lose interest in the later sculpture and painting which emerged from a more cramped religious approach. I consider the eight-armed Nataraja a logical development of Vedic poetry. The earliest Indian plastic art should not be looked for in images and statues but in the earliest pottery--the toy carts and birds and other representations in baked clay, exhibited in Taxila, going back to 1000 B.C. or so. They have *no* trace of Chinese influence. They who could mould clay models for children's toys could not possibly ignore the possibility of sculpture. And if Krishna's cult is older than Buddhism, which it definitely is, sculptured images of Krishna are and should be older. Further still, there was free commerce and I believe even intellectual traffic between Babylon, Egypt and India. And Babylon was full of statuary, and a people with the trading instinct of Indians could not ignore sculpture for commercial purposes either. It is astonishing what Indian pottery is capable of even today. An old potter of seventy in Delhi, who died recently, used to exhibit at Diwali a likeness of himself. He used to sit beside it, smoking

his hukka, and it was almost impossible at the first glance to distinguish the living from the motionless potter. But, alas, where is patronage? He would have sold it for perhaps Rs.10. Nonè (not even I) bought it."

In the Ms., Jawaharlal Nehru wrote about 'Maya, or illusion'. In doing so he went by westerners' notion of the term (as set out, for instance, in the Concise Oxford Dictionary). Commenting on this Asaf Ali said : "I think in philosophical language, and perhaps in the Vedic sense also, Maya really implied 'appearance' but meant and was used as the power by which the unmanifest manifested itself. That is my impression and I think Radhakrishnan says the same thing." The reference was modified by Nehru (p. 82, *The Discovery of India*) to "Maya, or what is popularly believed to be illusion."

Several comments of Asaf Ali pertain to passages dealing with the Hindu-Muslim encounter in the sub-continent. He says : "Hindi would be the proper word for Indian, and as adjective for Indian culture, just as we speak of European culture. Sikhs, Parsis, Jews and Muslims could call themselves Hindi, but not Hindu." The relevant passage on p.76 of *The Discovery of India* reads: "In the countries of Western Asia, in Iran and Turkey, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt and elsewhere, India has always been referred to, and is still called, Hind; and everything Indian is called 'Hindi'. 'Hindi' has nothing to do with religion, and a Moslem or Christian Indian is as much a Hindi as a person who follows Hinduism as a religion."

In a passage (p. 390 of *The Discovery of India*) beginning with the remark, "Since British rule came to India, Moslems have produced few outstanding figures of the modern type", Nehru appears to have taken into account Asaf Ali's remarks: "But why is it astonishing? The so-called foreign Muslim stock is now said to be ten per cent or even less. Since a majority of the 90 per cent Hindu converts are believed to have come from people suppressed for 2,000 to 3,000 years, the paucity you refer to is natural. Conversion became such a wholesale affair in Bengal because the ruling minority was like the South African and East African white settlers in a sense, with the vast majority of the Shudras and the land-labouring Vaisyas remaining depressed and the untouchables being condemned to a life of misery. Moreover, the lag of nearly a century (Bengal) and in some cases of 200 years (Madras) in modern education has to be taken into consideration. I am aware of no Tagores, P.C.Rays and Ramans repeated by the other Provinces." The passage in Nehru's work says: "This incapacity to march with the changing times and adapt themselves culturally and otherwise to a new environment was not of course due to any innate failing...In Bengal the backwardness of the Moslems was most marked, but this was obviously due to two causes: the destruction of their upper classes during the early days of British rule, and the fact that the vast majority were converts from the lowest class of Hindus, who had long been denied opportunities of growth and progress."

With reference to various passages in Nehru's work, Asaf Ali makes remarks such as:

Quotation from Ms.  
of 'The Discovery of India'

Remarks by Asaf Ali

"When Islam came to Iran, etc."

Surely it should be 'Arabs'.

"Spread of Islam in Central Asia."

It should be: 'Conquest of Central Asia by Moslem Arabs or just Arabs'.

"Moslem rule."

I would prefer to call it Turki.

593  
3rd line - one of the same  
be too many.

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3rd line - At the time of Islam  
here is almost identifiable  
all the achievements of  
the Muslim Arabs & later  
Turks & Afghans, & Muslims  
I would suggest keeping  
'Islam above these  
and all achievements'  
since the only force was  
the one for the empire  
to take as a result of  
the rise of the  
in the 7th & 8th centuries  
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A summative comment by Asaf Ali on this subject reads: "Reference to 'Muslim invasion of North': I have an old and inveterate objection to referring to the Arab, Turkish, Pathan and Mughal invasions as Muslim invasion. One can say they were Moslems. But if the Aryan, Neo-Aryan, Iranian, Greek and other invasions are not referred to as, shall we say, Vedist, Zoroastrian or Magian, Dionysian or Animist or Taoist invasions, I see no reason to change the tribal character of the conflict. Surely we do not refer to the French and British rulers as Christian rulers. It is desirable to restore the secular character of events."

The point was well taken by Jawaharlal Nehru. He says (pp.237 & 241 of *The Discovery of India*): "Indian history has usually been divided by English as well as some Indian historians into three major periods: Ancient or Hindu, Moslem, and the British period. This division is neither intelligent nor correct...It is wrong and misleading to talk of a Moslem invasion of India or of the Moslem period in India, just as it would be wrong to refer to the coming of the British to India as a Christian invasion, or to call the British period in India a Christian period."

Also of interest is Asaf Ali's comment on the so-called Mughal period that it would be more appropriate to describe the situation in and for quite some time after Akbar's reign as a Mughal-Rajput coalition. Asaf Ali says: "Reference to Akbar and Mughal empire. I have always maintained that the so-called Mughal empire was really a Mughal-Rajput coalition. On that basis alone it rested in Akbar's time and endured down to the time of Jai Singh, when the Mughals and the Rajputs broke down together, due to complex causes." There is a resonance of these remarks in *The Discovery of India* (p.259): "As a warrior he (Akbar) conquered large parts of India, but his eyes were set on another and more enduring conquest, the conquest of the minds and hearts of the people...Throughout his long reign of nearly fifty years from 1556 onwards he laboured to this end. Many a proud Rajput chief, who would not have submitted to any other person, he won over to his side. He married a Rajput princess, and his son and successor, Jehangir, was thus a half Mughal and half Rajput Hindu. Jehangir's son, Shah Jehan, was also the son of a Rajput mother. Thus racially this Turko-Mongol dynasty became far more Indian than Turk or Mongol...This Mughal-Rajput cooperation, which continued in subsequent reigns, affected not only government and the administration and army, but also art, culture and ways of living."

Jawaharlal Nehru's remarks (on p. 168 of his work) on the permeation of Indian languages by Sanskrit vocabulary bear the impress of the information and analysis offered by Asaf Ali: "*Basic Sanskrit* in my opinion would amount to basic Hindustani, and would be very close even to Urdu. (I am not talking of classical Sanskrit though even that would gain popularity if it is reformed by indicating Sandhi with hyphens: I could read and compare the *Yog Vashisht* in



Sanskrit with its English translation only after breaking up the Sandhi, as it were.)

"You could safely add that 80% of Urdu words are direct derivatives from Sanskrit. All verbs without an exception are such, all prepositions, most conjunctives, and a large number of adjectives, adverbs, personal pronouns, and numerals are entirely indigenous. Among the remaining 20% about half or even more are Persian and only the rest are Arabic or Turki, with one in a thousand English, and less French, or Portuguese. I would any day call Urdu a truer Indo-Aryan language than, say, Gujarati which has a very high admixture of foreign words--Persian, Saka, Turki, Arabic etc. Surely Urdu which has 80% Braj Bhashic and 10-15% Persian words is more truly Indo-Aryan."

The catholicity of Asaf Ali's outlook is strikingly illustrated by his comment on the places of natural beauty chosen by the ancients as places of pilgrimage and cited by Nehru (on p.192 of *The Discovery*): "Shouldn't Dwaraka, Puri, Thanesar, Pushkar, Kurukshetra, Kailas-Manasarovar, Nathdwara, also be added here? And Abu for the Jains. Aren't there 16 Tirthasthanas?"

Referring to the disdain expressed by Jawaharlal Nehru (pp . 65- 66 of the printed work) for individual Congress candidates in the 1937 elections for the provincial assemblies, in contrast to his (Nehru's) own interest in ideology and in the Congress programme, Asaf Ali tells his friend gently: "I would mellow the disassociation with candidates."

Of interest are the following two entries in Asaf Ali's Prison Diary about his discussion of these and other points with Jawaharlal Nehru, and how the shared discovery of India helped to bring the two of them closer.

*14th November 1944* . For the last few days I have been reading the manuscript of Jawaharlal's '*Discovery of India*'. This is the latest revelation of his mind. So far I have read only four out of eight or ten parts. The fifth is before me now.

I have already discussed with him my comments on the first four parts, and he has taken down notes. Some of my points concerned trifling matters, orthographical or verbal. Others were matters of some importance, which went to some of the starting points of his approach. His patience and readiness to accept suggestions has left on my mind a pleasant impression. And there is something in this attitude which spells much hope for India, if only the future does not crush it out of him.

I could not help feeling, as I jocularly remarked to Maulana, that Jawahar's book reads rather like a good synopsis of the 19th Puran (a culmination of the known eighteen is overdue). It is an encyclopaedic review of the past and the present and a kind of prophecy of the future. I have told Jawaharlal that his review of the distant past is sometimes in the superlative strain and is liable to act as a soporific more than as a stimulant. The present

generation undoubtedly needs to be reminded of the glorious past; but what is far more essential, in my opinion, is the need to make them aware of the inadequacy of the past, the achievements of other peoples in the present, and the ideals that can be realised in the future through enlightened endeavour. To my mind, Miss Mayo's 'Mother India' kind of stuff, properly juxtaposed with a just appreciation of the past, is what the country needs.

Today the Muslims in India even more than the Hindus are employing the umbrella of the idealised past for comforting shelter and escape from the scorching heat of glaring reality. Even among the Hindus, it is only the really thinking and rationally aware few who are trying to adjust themselves to the present. The rest are apt to read far too much in the misty past. There have been so many interpolations and even forgeries in Sanskrit literature that the unwary (and all of us, outside the circle of profound scholars, are unwary) tend to become victims of exaggeration.

An Indo-Turki like Ghiasuddin Tughlaq knew the secret of progress. He said : "Keep affairs of state separate from religion, which is a matter of personal preference." I pointed this out to Jawaharlal yesterday, while discussing some points arising out of his 'Discovery'. He himself is strongly inclined that way. But I felt, while reading his manuscript, that he was unconsciously affected by some of the prevailing impressions among the Hindus about the consequences and problems of the Arab and later Turki, Afghan and Turko-Mughal invasions of and settlements in India. However, I was very glad that he undertook to revise or reconsider much.

He accepted my suggestion that 'Moslem invasion', 'Moslem government' etc. were not appropriate expressions. They somehow lumped together various factors and elements, and assumed the Hindus and Muslims to be a kind of thesis and antithesis. Even if that were not incorrect historically, the synthesis which has existed for several centuries, and which must be promoted and encouraged, will suffer by such an attitude. He saw the point instantly.

I am glad that I have had this opportunity of both looking into his mind and telling him how I have reacted to some of his thoughts. Of course it is for him to review and recast anything or not.

*30th November 1944* . I finished Jawahar's 'Discovery of India' Ms. last week and our discussion of the points I had noted was concluded a couple of days ago. In the last part of the book he looks ahead to India's role in the world. While discussing this I 'sold' him--to use an American idiom--the idea of an Indian Ocean League: that is, India, the pivotal subcontinent, with the Middle Eastern countries up to Iraq, and the whole of Malaysia and Indonesia. In my opinion this is a natural economic federal region, which must stand together. He seemed to like the idea.

I feel that these discussions over the 'Discovery' have been useful. It has brought us nearer together and we have come to know each other's mind. It is possible that he has looked into the working of my mind for the first time. And he must have realised that my range is not confined to day-to-day politics or some hobbies like studying flowers and the vegetable kingdom in general, and watching termites, spiders, stars, butterflies and birds, and gazing at the sky or writing verses. His feeling of intimacy towards me is evident.

## **CAMEOS: Gandhiji**

*18th January 1943* . The newspapers are under censorship but there is enough in the papers to show that the country is moved to its depth by Gandhiji's three-week fast which has now entered the 9th day.

*1st March 1943*: So the crisis is nearly over! A veritable miracle has been wrought. On the 21st of last month the news was so bad that here we had all given up hope. Today Gandhiji completes 20 days, and is reported to be 'holding on well'. God, what faith and will can do!

*3rd March 1943* : At long last, 21 centuries of anguish are over today. Mahatma Gandhi has miraculously pulled through the fast and has broken it.

It is reported that, in a fresh 'charge sheet', they have accused Gandhiji of using his non-violence as a mask. They dare say this of the apostle of truth and non-violence, with whom the Working Committee had to tussle in 1940 for a concession as regards the use of troops by the State! If Gandhiji can be charged with assuming a 'mask' of non-violence, who on earth is left to claim sincerity and purity of intention and deed?

My mind goes back to my first significant meeting with Gandhiji, in 1919. I was assisting C.R.Das in connection with the Hunter Committee that was appointed to inquire into the Punjab disorders and repression. The Committee was presided over by Lord Hunter and had among its members Justice Rankin, Chimanlal Setalvad, Pandit Jagat Narain and Sahib Zada Sultan Ahmed. It was to begin its work at Delhi. C.R.Das was to lead the presentation of the people's case, and to suggest counter-accusations against the Government and their police and other officers.

Delhi's case was prepared by me after some other lawyers had helped to record the evidence that was to be led by us. The general brief I had prepared ran into some 20 typewritten foolscap sheets. Gandhiji arrived in Delhi to supervise the whole work of the defence. He was staying with his friend Principal Rudra. Gandhiji looked at my lengthy brief and returned it to me with the direction that it should be reduced to 'half a sheet of paper'. It knocked me flat. How could one reduce facts covering 20 pages to half a sheet of paper?

Then Gandhiji told me the story of Gokhale's interview with Lord Morley, then Secretary of State, and Morley's insistence that Gokhale's memorandum on the Reforms--which eventually took the shape of the 1911 Constitution--should be reduced to half a sheet of paper. I was rash enough to undertake to complete the task by the evening. I carried it out by reducing facts and events to categories, excising comments and compressing counter-charges to the briefest compass. But I could not get it typed out till late in the evening, and took it to Gandhiji only the next morning. He greeted me with: "You have barely saved yourself. I was wondering whether you would fail us. A promise is a promise, and should be kept." Gandhiji looked at the draft and was pleased with it, and passed it as 'excellent'.

Soon afterwards I had the privilege of spending a whole afternoon and evening in the company of the great man. There was a Khilafat meeting in March 1920 at Meerut, where Gandhiji was going to propound the four-fold Non-Cooperation programme. I accompanied him on this trip. Also with us were his younger son Devadas, and Mahadev Desai. As the car which carried us was whirling along, Gandhiji plied me with questions, asking for equivalents in Urdu of certain English words and phrases. He was obviously occupied with the mental preparation of his speech. He wished to know, for example, how one would say in Urdu: "For clean ends you must employ clean means." The phrase sank deep in my mind, for that was the pivot of his entire thinking.

I had some difficulty in finding simple words to express this idea, not because the thought or words were scarce in Urdu, but simple words resting on Hindi hinges would not come to my mind. Arabic words came more readily. However, Gandhiji fixed his choice upon some out of the synonyms I offered. He weighed his words, as the world knows by now, with great precision and did not use those which might vary his thought even by a delicate shade.

By the time we reached Meerut it was past tea time. Naturally my first thought was to suggest to our hosts that the party should have tea before Gandhiji was taken to the meeting. Gandhiji firmly vetoed it. And to my shame and horror he brought it up in an indirect way in the opening sentences of his address to the Conference. While stressing the gravity of the times through which the country and the Muslim community were passing and the harder times yet to be encountered, he said he felt that all this was not yet fully realised by those who were talking of righting the Khilafat and Jallianwala wrongs. People still thought in terms of their normal habits and wanted their tea at the usual time. Devadas and I had taken our stand right at the back of the audience in the packed theatre. The moment he referred to this I felt thoroughly ashamed of myself. The incongruity of normal life in the midst of the turn he was giving to men's

minds came home to me--not that I was in any way sparing myself. Soon I was to give up European-style dress, which entailed many superfluous habits not suited to the times. Gandhiji had the knack of constructing a sermon on a stray incident, event or example of human behaviour.

The return journey at night from Meerut, with Gandhiji on one side and I on the other and Devadas in between on the back seat during the forty-mile drive through an arbour of *shisham* trees, with occasional talk, is one of my happiest memories. Devadas dozed off and his head rested on Gandhiji's breast. Gandhiji tenderly supporting his sleeping child is an unforgettable picture in my mind.

*28th January 1944.* Gandhiji's 'era' is fast drawing to a close. His philosophy of life will not pass away with him but will, like all philosophies (and religions) go on influencing the thoughts and actions of many for a long time. But it will cease to be a political force the day he dies.

*24th February 1944 :* News was brought in by the Superintendent yesterday that Ba (Kasturba Gandhi) died on the 22nd. Today's newspapers contained a full account of her last hours, and the cremation in Aga Khan House (Poona).

Poor dear Ba, and poor dear Mahatmaji! They have been parted after sixty years' fateful partnership. What a kind little lady she was. One of the sweetest women I have ever seen, a perfect mother and wife. She has died while in prison with her life's partner, respected and loved by millions. What a fortunate woman!

I remember a little incident. Gandhiji lay convalescing after his operation and release in 1933 in Poona, where a conference to sort out the issue of Council Entry had been convened. I was in a sense one of the two protagonists of the school of thought which wanted a reorientation--Satyamurti being the other. My 'open letter' to Gandhiji had become a kind of manifesto and ultimatum of the Swarajists.

I arrived in Poona for the Conference and went straight to Gandhiji. He asked me to sit on his bed, and we began our discussion. I said something to the effect that I had little to add to what I had written, and he replied: "I know and I understand it." Meanwhile Ba came along and I stood up. He said: "Don't get up, she is here only for a moment." But I could not sit down while she was standing, and said so. I saw a gleam of pleased appreciation in his face and eyes. I pulled a chair for Ba, and Gandhiji beckoned to her to take her seat. It was all so moving.

## **Jawaharlal Nehru**

*25th October 1942.* Jawaharlal and I are very happy at the success of our effort to raise a garden in the quadrangle of these barracks. It was almost

incredible that the torpid seeds which we had put in five days ago, into what looked like inhospitable-- though most carefully prepared--soil would succeed in waking up and breaking the ugly crust. The tender shootings peeping just above the dark earth presented the most joyous sight You felt as if you had assisted at the birth of a sylvan symphony. I believe hollyhocks will come up today, and cornflower, nasturtium and petunias tomorrow or the day after, and sweet peas in another day or two. So our garden is actually springing up. I am glad that Jawahar and I decided on this hobby. Our partnership has proved fruitful not merely in the happy results of gardening but it has, I think, brought us closer together in other respects too.

*26th October 1942.* Jawaharlal Nehru is subject to vocal release in his sleep. Last night we talked till about 10.30, but I could not go to sleep till after 12. After he left and Mahmud had gone to bed, I sat up in my chair for some time and then walked out into the open for a breath of fresh air. It was delightful out in the courtyard. The waning moon had gone past our skyline, and the brighter stars were defiantly bold. The air was fresh, and tinged with a nip. I returned and laid down in my bed. I was about to go off when, at about 12, I heard first a smothered groan and then other inarticulate sounds and once or twice a garbled pronunciation of my name as if somebody half-gagged was calling me. It was Jawahar talking in his sleep and, I suppose, shouting for help or as a warning. He sleeps in the verandah, a few paces from my window. When I inquired from him this morning "What was the row about?", he just smiled and shrugged his shoulders, pleading amnesia.

*23rd December 1942 :* J.N. was in a pleasant and confiding mood yesterday, after some time. There was, a week or ten days ago, a little uncalled for show of bad temper on his part. Despite my hypersensitiveness I showed remarkable self-control. He came round half an hour afterwards and handsomely apologised. But once I am upset, it takes me almost days to regain my ease with the offending party. However, we drifted back gradually into a happier attitude, and yesterday he provided proof of his return to friendliness. He showed me the copy of a letter he had sent in the morning to Mme. Chiang Kai-Shek *chez* the Government. It was, in his words, the result of a brainwave. The excuse was the newspaper report of her illness, and to convey New Year greetings. Jawahar has reiterated his pledge to stand by China and the cause for which China stands, and has regretted the circumstances which have prevented 'us' from redeeming that pledge. In a sense it is a well timed move. Whether the letter reaches its destination or not, it cannot fail to attract the attention of the government. This reaffirmation of undimmed conviction really shifts the burden of responsibility for the present impasse to their shoulders.

*1st January 1943 :* The first day of the New Year is about to pass. And

"every day we live, a day we die." I was too tired to keep awake last night for ringing in the new year. Most of us were sound asleep when the expiring year handed over the torch to the next runner. But I was up at 4.30 a.m., well before the first golden ray of the sun touched the cheek of the exiting night. And then by five or so I exchanged greetings with Jawahar and Maulana.

Jawahar had sent for roses to decorate the table, and he went about humming Auld Lang Sine. What an Englishman he is at heart! And what a tragic irony that he should draw on himself the wrath of the British imperialists every now and again, and find himself immobilised at this crucial moment of history.

**28th January 1944** : The only person who can take Gandhiji's place as an acknowledged all-India leader, whom the world has come to regard as such, is Jawahar. He is 55 now, and if for some reason or other he does not come into power to translate his ideas into practical forms, say for another ten years, he will lose the opportunity to do what he alone can do for this country. And I can descry none in the ranks of the younger generation who can acquire this unique position. Given an opportunity, Jawahar can guide India out of the confined past into the light of the new world—a rational and wide-awake, dynamic and fast progressing world.

**13th July 1944** : Dr Pattabhi has become fairly intimate with me, and comes over for some time daily, either to read some Urdu book with me—e.g. *Darbar-i-Akbari*-- or to discuss politics. I have found him frank and outspoken, patient and polite. He does not seem to have any reserve with me, and discusses persons freely.

It appears that while Jawahar is held in affection by the 'night club' friends (which means nearly all but three of us-- Maulana, Mahmud and I), none seems to regard him capable of the constructive patience and ability of a good leader ! Isn't it strange?

Among Gandhiji's followers, especially, Jawahar is held to be animated by a desire to outstrip all others as a 'modern leader'. All I can say is that if Jawahar only realised the meaning of *primus inter pares* and did not allow himself to say or do things--he does it unconsciously--which give others an idea that he believes himself to be the yardstick in every matter, and his tastes and ideas as the ultimate standard, he would be an ideal chief by virtue of his real ability, nobility of character and desire to be useful. But his impulsive outbursts and ultra-westernism somehow put off many, like Pattabhi, Patel, Shankar Rao and that group. It is a million pities.

## **Sardar Patel**

**26th January 1944** : Two days ago a notice was received from the Secretary of the Bombay Government, in pursuance of Ordinance III of

1944, stating the grounds for our detention. This is the first formal intimation of the grounds, after 17 1/2 months of detention! The grounds are that: "You were a party to the passing of the Congress Resolution of 8th August 1942 sanctioning a mass movement calculated to impede the successful prosecution of the war", and "if not detained, you would have taken part in organising and conducting this movement."

A meeting was called today to take the Independence Pledge. Maulana and Patel made brief speeches. Then at Pattabhi's suggestion the question of the notice was taken up. The issue was whether it should be ignored, or should be met with a rejoinder. Jawaharlal did not think any rejoinder was called for. He thought that it would not fit in with 'our dignity'. The political situation had reached a plane where noticing these legal points was irrelevant.

I differed. The grounds were entirely misleading and biased, and we should refute the charges which were intended to besmear us. The August 1942 resolution offered wholehearted cooperation to the United Nations in the prosecution of the war on terms worthy of a great country and consistent with the people's indefeasible rights. The contingency of a mass movement under Gandhiji's lead could not arise until the rejection of this offer by the British Government. I pointed out that no opportunity was allowed by the Government for negotiations. Precipitate orders were issued for detention. Further, I maintained that Gandhiji's letter to the Viceroy following his release, declaring his readiness to consider the situation *de novo*, rendered even these alleged grounds void. We must join issue on these points, I urged, through a communication to be sent by the Congress Secretary.

Jawaharlal admitted the logical soundness of my proposal but felt that the demands of dignity precluded a rejoinder. I persisted, and wanted to know *whether argument was excluded from notions of dignity*. "No", he said.

Then I saw no reason for allowing it to be said that we acquiesced in the charges made against us. The meeting was adjourned for further discussion of the issue.

**27th January 1944 :** My draft reply was approved by Maulana. I showed it Jawaharlal. He read it and kept quiet. Pattabhi approved of my points. Patel seemed to be in a huff.

I do not like Patel's attitude. He seems to consider everyone who does not agree with his point of view a sort of delinquent.

on the proposition, Pattabhi supported my suggestion  
I quoted from Mahatma Gandhi's letters and  
ily for it, but a little more mildly against  
to ridicule it--pointless questions. Ghosh  
about the Bengal famine, and opposed it!  
was ironical. And Patel opposed it most



vehemently as 'undignified'.

Jawaharlal in his second speech was again quite decent about the logic of my proposal, but professed his temperamental objection. Maulana summed up the debate and made it clear that there was no question of a rejoinder being undignified or in the least harmful. But it was not likely to be of any consequence either, because the main question rested on higher policies.

I felt inclined to reply to the debate but left it alone, for after all Mahatma Gandhi has already said all he could have, in his letters to the Viceroy.

Mahmud purposely kept quiet during the debate because Patel & Co. have, time and again, spoken in a manner rather ironical, indicating that Mahmud, I and (less marked) Maulana don't come up to their mark. It is a galling and unfortunate attitude, and if I have not shown as much resentment as I and Mahmud (and even Maulana) feel at times, it is simply to avoid bitterness during our stay here.

*20th April 1944* . My talk with Vallabhbhai on my idea of a Commonwealth of India has travelled in some form to the different 'clubs' here. Jawaharlal brought the news to Maulana that I was described as going one better than Jinnah. There is no limit to narrowness, suspicion and a fanatical adherence to the idea that only that political structure which some of these gentlemen have in view is the best. Some six months ago, when I spoke in similar terms to Narendra Dev, he held that the principle of self-determination could not be permitted to be exercised by anybody except by the population of India as a whole. He further said that all those who thought along those lines--we were talking of Muslims--would have to be 'driven out' of India. I stopped the talk with the rejoinder, 'Try it!' Since then I have not discussed politics with him. On earlier occasions I decided to eschew discussions with Kripalani for similar reasons. And yesterday Shankarrao flew into a rage and said: "Every inch of ground is mine--the land of five rivers, and Peshawar, are sacred to me." He could not see that if the Muslim majority in certain parts of India wanted self-government and this was denied, it would mean the imposition of Hindu rule on them. It is a pity that even tried and tested patriots cannot talk of these things in a rational way. I felt very depressed afterwards. It is a subject which has not been debated by the Working Committee for fear, I am sure, of acrimony.

### **Maulana Azad**

*5th November 1943* : I had a relapse of colic ten days ago, and in its wake malaria. I seem to have got rid of it only now, after days of saturation with quinine. What a wretched time I have had these two months and more. Maulana has been very tender and sincerely sympathetic and helpful.

Every time he has heard me groan, he has come to me.

*9th January 1944* : The new year began rather sadly in our little colony. Maulana's sister Abru Begum died on the 30th December. He and we first got the information through the newspapers received here on the 2nd January. It seems to have cast a deeper gloom over Maulana than even his wife's passing away.

*26th September 1944* : Maulana and I are next door, and often talk across the screen that separates us. He is writing a history of political events of the last 30 or 35 years, and many literary and philosophical essays. We discuss much, and the topics are mostly serious, not light. Strangely enough we agree almost on all subjects. Jawaharlal, I fear, is leaning a great deal on the rediscovered greatness of ancient India. I do hope it does not overlay his progressive outlook. He has acquired a somewhat unfortunate trick of affecting omniscience, and disconcerting one by holding forth from a higher level of encyclopaedic information. This puts me off. In spite of my desire to discuss with him many things I freeze up. So does Maulana. But Maulana can in turn manage monologues with him. I can't indulge such luxury.

*14th November 1944* : The 11th was Maulana's birthday and today is Jawaharlal's. Nobody knew anything about the former excepting myself, and I refrained from informing others. Maulana does not like fuss, though I don't suppose--barring Jawaharlal--anybody here would have cared to fuss.

Jawaharlal's birthday has somehow called for celebration since his first birthday here, in 1942. He does not dislike it. Even politics, patriotism and nationalism somehow tend to become anthropomorphic in a sense. Jawaharlal, after Gandhiji, has already been admitted to the national pantheon--not only in the estimation of India's millions but in the estimation of foreigners everywhere--as the next in degree. But I suppose his real apotheosis is yet to come. However, his birthday has already become a recognised national ceremony, here too.

I have noted this fact to illustrate how masses of human beings create symbols of their aspirations or emotions. When somebody asked Jawaharlal at the time of the Chiang Kai-sheks' visit something about India, he was reported to have said : "I am India." Even at that time I wondered how some other aspirants must have felt.

*8th December 1944* : We have completed today two years and four months of the most rigorously segregated detention. The relaxation of interview rules having been disregarded by us, the segregation is now self-imposed. The Home Member's replies in the Central Assembly on this subject of interviews were so wanting in veracity that many of us here felt that something had to be done. At last Maulana was persuaded to address a letter to Wavell to challenge the suppression of truth. He was at first

unwilling to take any notice of it. But Vallabhbhai, backed by others, pressed the point. One evening I, too, put in a word. I drafted a few points in Urdu on a sheet and gave it to Maulana to consider. The next day he gave me a draft of his own, accepting my main structure but omitting the more far-reaching points. And when asking me to English it, he said : "You see, what I have said is likely to lead to further correspondence, when the other points can be taken up. This is enough for the present."

We have put in a reference to Gandhiji's declaration about suspension of a mass movement, and pointed out that some of the Government's acts of commission and omission are indefensible: e.g. the refusal to permit Gandhiji to meet us even after his declaration; and refusing permission to Phillips to contact any of us--or even Gandhiji. We have emphasised the unfairness of carrying on false propaganda world-wide against the Congress.

I rendered it into English, but had some difficulty in keeping literally close to Maulana's writing. Knowing how sensitive he is about his drafts, and how he has rejected variations of his drafts by Jawaharlal on one or two occasions, I had to sail as close to his words as possible. I was not happy with the result: for, some of Maulana's elegant Urdu expressions done in English sounded stilted. When the translation was completed, Jawahar saw it and, with one or two additions at Vallabhbhai's instance, the final draft was faired out by me and handed in.

It was a job skating on thin ice, between Maulana's sensitiveness and Jawahar's criticism. To my mind, the omission of conventional phrasing demanded a more personal touch, but our anomalous situation here does not permit it. However, with a tortuous sentence or two, the letter was completed, signed and handed over to the Superintendent.

*9th December 1944* . They grow monotonous of this place--fancy twenty-eight months of incarceration at one place--is enough to wear out one's freshness and the capacity for work. Luckily, to me metaphysical excursions and poetry come like refreshing gusts of wind. Once a poem grips you, it will not be denied even if you are dying; like truth, it must out.

Maulana is a great believer in *tahmiz* (Arabic for hors-d'oeuvre or, rather, pickles) and he resorts to intellectual breaks, or suspension of serious thought, at least twice or thrice daily for a few minutes when he busies himself with odd things like pruning creepers, or just talking at random for the sake of amusement. On such occasions I join him in the talk, and it becomes a game of playing with words or ideas, parodying well known poets, and so on. It is an interesting pastime.

Maulana combines a sharp and swift mind with wide reading, and his prodigious memory and insistent logic give him a great advantage over most others. But somehow he appears to fight shy of steady creation. However, he is now occupied in some creative work. He has written reams

and reams of prose during these two-and-a-quarter years, and it is bound to be first-rate prose larded with poetic expressions. What it is all about is more than I can guess. But his avidity for scientific books--relativity, physics, chemistry--and pursuit of history, and history of thought, Eastern and Western, indicates that he is engaged on a major work.

## Syed Mahmud

Mahmud is the only person here to whom the ritual side of religion has as much meaning as its spiritual realm. It is difficult to define religion and spirituality, with their varying significance for each individual according to his bent. Even Balzac's atheist (in *The Atheist's Mass*) had a religion of his own. Though his rational self rebelled against the revealed, traditional religions, his sense of integrity was deeper by far than may be found in the blatantly and garishly devout. He said mass in an obscure church to avoid the shallow and ostentatious rationalist, because he had pledged his word to his dying mother. To be true to our roots, and to be faithful to the law of our being is the essence of spirituality in the profound sense.

My sceptical tendencies blossomed by the time I was 17. I began to sibilate, in stark ostentation, a half-digested agnosticism derived from Huxley and Spencer, to the intense repugnance of my horrified mother. I have never ceased to regret the flaunting of my agnosticism, for it caused my mother great distress. It was in later years that maturity brought me a respectful recognition of emancipated spirituality. But in my adolescence I could not, in all honesty, conform to the ritual which is the common fare of those who sacrifice the core of belief for the husk of traditional religiosity.

I recalled all this while, realising how frightfully handicapped Mahmud is on account of his curtailed eyesight, I offered to read him the Quran. He is observing the first fast of the Ramazan today (13th September 1942), and I have just finished reading out to him one of the thirty parts of the Quran. I was quite surprised at my facility in completing the 22 pages within half an hour. My early study and my mother's frequent recitation of the Quran were embedded in my mind, and the occasion woke up the dormant memory.

*12th October 1942.* It is Id today. The delicate and most perfectly carved scythe of the new moon last evening stood silent and mournfully innocent over a rough-hewn cloudlet of orange in the west--just above the skyline of our prison fortress. There was a mild stir in our colony. At least one among us, Mahmud, who had observed 27 out of the 29 fasts (he was compelled by fever the last two days to give up fasting) deserved all the greetings which go with the Id new moon.

Some four centuries ago the Id moon must have meant merry-making on

a royal scale within these walls. How many Ids must have come and gone since then, and what revelries or tragedies, romance and wars the Id moon must have witnessed in this fort and in the old buried palaces! If only the moon could narrate her tales, why, the incidents of the last 400 years would be sufficient for a lifetime of absorbing study. For the Nizamshahi kings and queens and their Muslim and Hindu noblemen, and grandees of the kingdom, Id must have meant the occasion for a great release of the human desire to make as much of life as possible. We, too, have sent for about fifteen rupees' worth of sugar, milk and some almonds, pistachio and dry dates, for giving the ordinary prisoners and the poor warders (altogether about twenty-five) besides the twelve of us, a feed on something rare in these surroundings.

My mother used to deplore my indifference as a youth to Id and Bakr-Id. Well, she is fast asleep in her grave till eternity, and Id can never again be for me what it used to be while she was alive--all the feverish preparation for the day of days, her tearful blessings, and the embrace and kiss of motherly love. Rene has kept up the ceremonies to maintain the family tradition. I do miss the kids Maffo, Billo and Naffo,<sup>8</sup> and some of the friends who make it a point to call on me on Id and Bakr-Id--specially Khwaja Hasan Nizami and Wahidi who never miss doing so--and the telegraphic exchange of greetings between me and the Nawab of Rampur, that characteristic maintenance of *wazadari*.

Towards the close of 1944 Syed Mahmud, suffering from ill health, secured his release from detention by informing the Government that he was not in favour of the Congress resolution of August 1942 and undertaking to keep himself aloof from politics if freed. The assurance was given in a communication to the Viceroy which Syed Mahmud kept a secret from fellow-members of the Congress Working Committee who were under detention along with him. Asaf Ali's diary notes of this period bring out both his initial unwillingness to believe newspaper reports about Mahmud's secret letter to the Government, and his subsequent feeling of distress over the episode.

*6th October 1944* : Quite suddenly, some time in the afternoon, Mahmud was informed that orders for his unconditional release had been received. It is a good thing, because he was frightfully worried over domestic troubles and was himself a permanent invalid. There was no point in detaining him, for he was opposed to Gandhiji's idea of a movement. I have advised Mahmud to 'keep off the grass' and just stay put, for after all if he is to get back to his domestic life there is no point in getting mixed up with politics.

*15th October 1944* : How strange! For the last five or six days Mahmud has become the subject of much anxious curiosity, if not also of suspicious speculation and penetrating inquiries here. Some newspaper correspondent started the ball rolling by saying that it was believed in certain circles,

in New Delhi and Bombay, that Mahmud had not been released on grounds of health but had been in correspondence with Government and had, in some way, indicated that he was not going to have anything to do with Gandhiji's movement. It was further reported that, approached in Bombay, Mahmud said he would not, until he has seen Gandhiji, either confirm or deny that he has been in correspondence with Government.

It is now definitely ascertained by Vallabhbhai Patel that Mahmud did send a sealed letter somewhere, probably to Government. Maulana says that Mahmud did mention the fact of sending a letter to Government complaining against the inadequacy of the medical attention he was receiving. Anyway I am perfectly certain that it is most unfair to suspect poor Mahmud of having secured his release by giving an undertaking. True, he was opposed to the August resolution and he was far from approving of this stalemate. But he would never give an undertaking, I am sure. I regret to say that, with honourable exceptions, some of the colleagues here have carried their discussions and speculations to a painfully extreme length on this subject. Well! Such is the value of one's credit in public life. It can be blown off the waters like a bubble by the mere breath of suspicion. I have fought and resisted the insinuations as a loyal friend, and I believe Maulana and Jawahar have done the same. But I fear some of our colleagues remain suspicious. Mahmud has gone to Wardha, and in a day or two he is bound to clear up the position. However, it is a painful episode.

*19th October 1944* : The Mahmud controversy and speculation have now developed into a serious accusation. It is clear from his brief statement that he did send a letter to Government (probably about his ailments) and he has asked for suspension of judgement until it is allowed to be published. But the accusation is that he kept it secret from everyone here. What a pity! He should have taken Jawahar into his confidence, and Patel says that it would have been better if Maulana had written to Government on Mahmud's behalf. It is ever so strange that Mahmud did not even so much as hint about it to me, though we used to talk about so many things every day. Anyway, the disagreeable atmosphere it has created here is unfortunate. And I do heartily dislike the reflection to which he is needlessly exposed.

*24th October 1944* : So the much awaited communication of Mahmud to the Viceroy has appeared in the press in two instalments (concluded today), with an introductory statement by him and a brief comment by Gandhiji. Mahmud has said that he is "guilty of gross indiscretion" in sending the letter without the knowledge or consent of anyone of his colleagues here. And Gandhiji has, after pointing out the 'indiscretion', almost absolved him because of the purity of his intention.

Now it is clear that while Maulana and I used to tease Mahmud about his

confidential writing, he was engaged in drafting and making a fair copy of this letter. It is a matter of the greatest surprise to me, Maulana and to Jawahar--with whom Mahmud was sharing a room--that all this time he did not allow any of us to get the slightest inkling of it. I am genuinely sorry that his indiscretion has exposed him to disagreeable criticism and affected the whole of his future. I fear he has committed a serious mistake. Had he taken Jawahar or Maulana, preferably Jawahar, into his confidence he could have secured his object without attracting any blame. After all he has suffered these two years and more, and had behind him the work and services of a lifetime. However, be it far from me to judge a friend--or even a foe, if I cannot be just.

The episode has caused a serious situation here. At least one of our colleagues said: "Whom can you believe, now?"

## NOTES

1. Pet name of Prabhat Gangulee, youngest of Aruna's three brothers, who worked in the Education Department of the Government of India.
2. Pet name of Uditendra Gangulee, second younger brother of Aruna.
3. Writer reputed for his biographies, and husband of Nandita (Aruna's cousin) who was daughter of Nagendranath Gangulee (Aruna's paternal uncle) and Miradevi (daughter of Rabindranath Tagore).
4. Office of the Delhi Women's League in Daryaganj.
5. Pet name of Shobha, who was in a prohibited degree of relationship for the purpose of marriage with Prabhat Gangulee under Hindu customary law.
6. Asaf Ali had no means of knowing that, from soon after Gandhiji's release, there was sustained correspondence, as well as a meeting at Poona, between Gandhiji and Aruna. Gandhiji advised Aruna to give herself up, but she came out of underground only after the cancellation of her arrest warrant early in January 1946.
7. Aruna's paternal uncle Dhirendranath Gangulee, film maker who won the Dada Phalke Award.
8. The three children of Rauf Ali, dear friend of Asaf Ali.

## 9. Interim Government

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When Gandhiji, held in detention at the Aga Khan's palace in Poona, commenced a 21-day day fast on 10th February 1943, the British authorities were unmoved. The Congress having renounced power in the greater part of British India where its Ministries had ruled till September 1939, the British authorities had none to check the large-scale shipment of supplies from India--including food of which there was a domestic shortage--to help provision and feed the Allied forces at the war fronts. The Viceroy was not inclined to put at risk the free hand that he enjoyed, thanks to the self-denial of power by the Congress, by setting Gandhiji free. Preparations were therefore made, if the old man should die, to have his body cremated on the grounds of the Aga Khan's palace.

It was only on 6th May 1944, after the tide had turned decisively in favour of the Allies, that Gandhiji, who was suffering from malaria, was released unconditionally. There was now little risk in setting him free.

The talks which he sought and had with M.A. Jinnah during September 1944 made Gandhiji realise how deep-seated was Muslim separatism. He had always known that "the vast majority of Muslims of India are converts to Islam or descendants of converts". He now felt constrained to tell Jinnah: "I find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendants claiming to be a nation apart from the parent stock. If India was one nation before the advent of Islam, it must remain one in spite of the change of faith of a very large body of her children."<sup>1</sup> He who, in 1919, extended support to the pan-Islamic Khilafat movement, now expresses misgiving about pan-Islamism. Gandhiji asks Jinnah in a letter of 15th September 1944: "Is the goal of Pakistan pan-Islam?"

### **Bitter Harvest of Negativism**

Within a year of Gandhiji's release, with the surrender of Hitler's Germany imminent, the British authorities felt it safe enough to think of freeing the



members of the Congress Working Committee from detention. From 28th March 1945 they were gradually dispersed from Ahmadnagar and sent to their respective provinces, and released in June 1945. Several of them perhaps felt regret, as they looked round and saw the bitter harvest of the negative policy they had followed during the war years: Bengal left prostrate by famine and epidemics; the flower of India's freedom-loving youth being partly upbraided, and partly admired for having risen in spontaneous and violent revolt following the arrest of national leaders in August 1942; the Muslim League having made giant strides; and corruption rampant in the administration in the wake of wartime economic controls.

On the opening day of the crucial year 1942, as many as twelve out of the sixteen members of the Viceroy's Executive Council were Indians.<sup>2</sup> Had the Indian members included Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Maulana Azad or Asaf Ali, could not Britain's difficult situation have been turned to India's advantage? A significant sentence in an otherwise tendentious resolution adopted by the Government of India in August 1942, on the eve of the arrest of the national leaders, said: "But for the resistance of the Congress party to constructive endeavours, India might even now be enjoying self-government." Similar was Asaf Ali's view, referred to earlier: "A straightforward acceptance of Cripps's offer, under a reasoned and emphatic protest, and getting into the saddle would by now have enabled us to go a long way on the road to our goal. The very tempo of events would have brought about a spirit of practical give-and-take between the Congress, the League, and between India and Britain."

Asaf Ali was perhaps over-optimistic in expecting the League to become practical-minded and co-operative. But the Congress by adopting a rigid and negative stance left the field wide open for the Muslim League. It basked under the sunshine of British patronage during the war years when the Congress chose to go under a cloud. Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, as law Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, moved a Bill in September 1939, in the Central Legislative Assembly, to replace the Defence of India Ordinance. During the debate, F.E. James (Madras: European) praised the Muslim League's<sup>2</sup> 'loyal attitude'. This illustrated the congruence of British imperial and Indian Muslim League interests during the war years.

When fresh elections were held in 1945-46 to the provincial assemblies under the 1935 constitution, the Congress was to be confronted with the ultimate mortification of the Muslim League's ascendancy which it had unwittingly promoted through its relinquishment of power and its negativism during World War II. M.R.A. Baig writes: "In the elections to the Central Legislative Assembly in 1945, the Muslim League won every Muslim seat, the Nationalist Muslims forfeiting their deposits in many instances."

In the elections to the provincial legislatures, the Muslim League's record was as follows:

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Assam                        | Almost all the Muslim seats.  |
| Sind                         | 28 seats, Nationalist Muslims and other groups, 4.  |
| North West Frontier Province | Muslim League 17. Congress 19.  |
| Punjab                       | 75 out of 86 Muslim seats, with four independent Muslims joining the Muslim League after the elections. |
| Bihar                        | 34 out of 60 Muslim seats.  |
| United Provinces             | 54 out of 66 Muslim seats.  |
| Bombay                       | All 30 Muslim seats.  |
| Madras                       | All 29 Muslim seats.  |
| Central Provinces            | 13 out of 14 Muslim seats.  |
| Orissa                       | All four Muslim seats.  |
| Bengal                       | 113 out of 119 Muslim seats.  |

It is evident from the above data that the separatism of the Muslim League found the greatest support from Muslims in those parts of the sub-continent which could not possibly become part of Pakistan, formation of which was the objective of the political party they voted for. It had not occurred to Congress leaders to ask M.A. Jinnah whether he was prepared to receive, and how he would assimilate, in his proposed Pakistan the Malayalam-speaking Muslims of Kerala (distributed at that time over the Malabar district of Madras Province and the princely states of Travancore and Cochin), or the Tamil-speaking and Telugu-speaking Muslims of Madras Province. The problem was to get highlighted later, with the Mohajirs--Muslims who performed the *hijrat* to Pakistan from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere--finding themselves unwanted in the Pakistan for the creation of which they had applied their energies.

On the plus side was the affirmation of the will to be free, which the Quit India movement had demonstrated. A spontaneous expression of national sentiment which owed little to that aspect of Gandhiji that was womanish and self-abnegating, and everything to that in him which was heroic in the assertion of self-respect, the Quit India movement took everyone by surprise--including several participants. Aruna Asaf Ali, who became a living legend of that movement, says : "I was but a splinter of the lava thrown out by the volcanic eruption of a people's indignation."

The areas liberated during the Quit India struggle were soon recaptured : "The armies came and the planes came. They razed the villages (in liberated areas) to the ground. They ploughed the land where the villages once stood, in order to put an end to the very fact that such brave villages once existed."<sup>3</sup>

Speaking at Almora on 16th June 1945, the day following his release, Jawaharlal Nehru had said: "It is a matter for shame and sorrow that so many of our comrades are still behind prison walls. Their sufferings, unlike mine, have not hit the headlines. The world tends to forget them. That is why I want to pay homage to those unknown Congress soldiers who have borne the brunt of the struggle..I pay my homage to those who are playing with their lives and those who are now at the door of death. Among them, it is only in the fitness of things that I must take the name of one of India's brave women, Aruna Asaf Ali. If my voice can reach her, I want to send her my love and esteem. I want to tell her that whatever she has done shall not be wasted and will bear fruit. It will leave its impression on her countrymen."

Asaf Ali was deeply moved on reading this in the newspapers. From the Willingdon Hospital where he was convalescing, he sent a telegram to Nehru: "My undying gratitude for nobly owning disowned, "hunted. hounded, persecuted for sin of patriotism. Physically I have been at my last gasp more than once during past nine weeks without hope of seeing my wife but I repeat: every suffering is worthwhile if it benefits country and awakens human conscience."

## The I.N.A. Trials

Though the British authorities succeeded in putting out the fires of the Quit India movement, the embers were soon rekindled by the trial of officers and men of the Indian National Army in 1945 and by the mutiny of Indian ratings of the Navy early in 1946 in protest against racial discrimination.

The I.N.A. had been raised outside India by Subhas Chandra Bose during World War II to fight alongside the Japanese to secure the liberation of India. Recaptured by the British on their reoccupation of lost territories in the east, the prisoners elicited widespread popular sympathy.

As nationalists saw it, the British government could not reasonably complain of the conduct of the I.N.A. personnel. A part of the British Indian Army had been sent to Burma and Singapore, and when Japan occupied these regions the British government left the Indian Army to its fate. If the Indians had remained supine, as prisoners of war they would still have been compelled to undertake the construction of roads, or other work in factories, which would help the Japanese war effort. Instead, they decided that they would fight for Indian freedom. This was meant to enable the liberation of India by a national army rather than the occupation of India by Japanese forces.

Asaf Ali played a prominent part in the defence of the I.N.A. personnel. On 22nd September 1945 the Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution on the subject: "In view of the forthcoming trial by court martial of some officers and men belonging to the Hindustan Azad Fauj (Indian National Army) formed in Burma and Malaya, the Working Committee resolves that a defence

committee consisting of Sri Tej Bahadur Sapru, Shri Bhulabhai Desai, Dr. Kailash Nath Katju, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, Shri Asaf Ali (Convenor) and Shri Raghunandan Saran, with powers to co-opt, be formed to take all necessary steps for the defence of the officers and men and women of the I.N.A., or like forces, who may be brought up for trial."

The first batch of those to be tried included Capt. Sehgal, son of Justice Achhruram of the Lahore High Court. The other two officers were Shah Nawaz and Dhillon, also belonging to leading families of the Punjab. Political negotiations being under way for the reconstitution of the Governor-General's Executive Council and the revival of popular Ministries in the provinces, Bhulabhai Desai and Asaf Ali addressed a letter on 15th October on behalf of the I.N.A. Defence Committee suggesting that the trials might be abandoned or at least postponed. This was not agreed to. Asaf Ali took exception to certain statements made meanwhile by some highly placed British officials about the Azad Hind Government as a 'puppet' whom the accused served. Referring to a speech by Sir Maurice Hallet, Governor of the United Provinces, Asaf Ali said : "The matter is to be judged by a court, and statements calculated to prejudice the case are deplorable. One cannot easily control irresponsible opinion, but it is expected at least of those who hold responsible positions that they will refrain from influencing opinion in the Army."

The trial began on 5th November 1945, with Major General Blaxland as president of the court martial, in a large room on the second floor of a barrack in the historic Red Fort. The charges were: waging war against the King, and causing murder and abetment of murder of five sepoy who were caught deserting the I.N.A. An official statement during the trial estimated the strength of the I.N.A. at 43,000 out of whom 23,000 were previously civilians and 20,000 were soldiers of the Indian Army. With popular sentiment in favour of the I.N.A. personnel running high, Asaf Ali issued a statement on 25th November urging students not to take out processions and to avoid conflict with the police.

Bhulabhai Desai, who led the defence, argued that a subject race was entitled to wage war. He cited the American war of independence. Pointing out that both the prosecution and the defence agreed that war had been waged, Desai claimed the status of belligerency for the Azad Hind Fauj. His cross-examination elicited the admission from a prosecution witness, Sepoy Saidullah Khan, that he had been tutored. Japanese officials who gave evidence as defence witnesses stated that the Azad Hind government headed by Subhas Bose was independent, and had resisted Japanese pressure in certain matters.

The main trial took a dramatic turn when the Advocate General, on behalf of the Crown, conceded the patriotic motive of the accused and asked for leniency. He claimed that the charges had been proved, but said there was evidence that the accused did not act from a mercenary motive but were moved by what they considered, bona fide, to be a patriotic motive. The court martial

handed down a sentence of transportation for life in respect of Shah Nawaz, Dhillon and Sehgal. This was remitted by the Commander-in-Chief on 3rd January 1946 and the three were, instead, cashiered from the Army.

Asaf Ali said in a statement to the Press: "It is a matter for congratulation for all parties concerned that Shah Nawaz, Sehgal and Dhillon are free men today. The C-in-C has shown an imagination the want of which in some quarters has been responsible for much that was avoidable. Though Shah Nawaz, Sehgal and Dhillon are no longer officers of the Indian Army, they have the whole of their lives before them to serve their country and the cause of India's freedom for which they risked their lives. They fought outside for the attainment of independence and, I may add, for communal harmony. I sincerely trust that, henceforward, they and their comrades will become ambassadors of the unity of India."

On 3rd January evening a large gathering greeted the three I.N.A. heroes with cries of 'Jai Hind' and 'Inquilab Zindabad' when they visited Asaf Ali's house at Kucha Chelan. The next day Shah Nawaz addressed a meeting of about 10,000 Muslims at the Jama Masjid and exhorted them to unite with other communities in the battle for freedom. The meeting passed a resolution demanding the release of all I.N.A. personnel and of others detained in connection with the August 1942 movement, and cancellation of the warrant against Aruna Asaf Ali.

Meanwhile in October 1945, with the announcement of elections to the Central Legislative Assembly (over-due because of postponement during the war years), the Delhi Provincial Congress Committee announced Asaf Ali as its candidate from Delhi. Jawaharlal Nehru participated in the election campaign. Addressing a gathering of mill workers in Delhi on 2nd November, he said: "The question of the betterment of your lot is linked up with the struggle for freedom...I, or Mr. Asaf Ali who is our candidate from Delhi, do not want to beg for votes. Mr. Asaf Ali stands for certain principles. If you feel you must support these principles, you should vote for him." At another meeting the next day, Nehru said: "Certain questions have been addressed to me by the Hindu Students' Federation. A scurrilous attack has been made on Mr. and Mrs. Asaf Ali in a local paper. It is sheer impudence to make a personal attack on Mrs. Asaf Ali, whose bravery is a matter of pride for all our countrymen".

## **A Mission to Tamil Nadu**

In December 1945 the Congress Working Committee gave Asaf Ali an unusual, quasi-legal assignment. He was called upon to arbitrate in a dispute concerning Rajaji's membership of the Tamil Nadu Provincial Congress Committee. The dispute reflected the power tussle in the Tamil Nadu Congress between Rajaji's group and that of K. Kamaraj Nadar, and had its origin in C. Rajagopalachari's

dissociation from the Quit India movement of 1942 which he regarded as ill-timed.

Following the arrest of Kamaraj while he was on his way to Wardha with a list of Individual Satyagrahis for approval by Gandhiji, the acting president of the T.N.C.C., Obeidulla Sahib, abolished the Salem District Congress Committee (home district of Rajaji, who had been elected to the P.C.C. from the Tiruchengodu Taluk.) Satyagraha Committees were formed throughout Tamil Nadu consisting only of those who signed the Satyagraha pledge.

Towards the close of World War II and following the release of national leaders, the Congress organisation was revived. Preliminary to the election of delegates for the meeting of the All India Congress Committee to be held on 21st September 1945, the vacancy in the T.N.C.C. caused by Rajaji leaving the Congress on the issue of a mass movement during the war had to be filled. On 1st September 1945, the secretary of the Tiruchengodu Taluk Congress Committee invited nominations. Rajaji offered himself as a candidate, stating: "I was elected a member of the Provincial Congress Committee from Tiruchengodu for the Ramgarh Congress and since then a vacancy has arisen, of my place in the P.C.C. The President of the Indian National Congress has accepted me as an ordinary member of the Congress when the membership enrolment in the ordinary course had not commenced." No other nomination having been received, Rajaji was declared to have been "duly elected again to the P.C.C."

However the Working Committee of the P.C.C. adopted a resolution on 18th September 1945 declaring Rajaji's election to be invalid. Protest meetings were held by Rajaji's supporters.

A gathering of 210 Congress members of Tiruchengodu Taluk, presided over by Radhabai Subbaroyan, adopted resolutions on 17th December 1945 requesting the Provincial Congress Committee and the Congress Working Committee to recognise the election of Rajaji; requesting the Working Committee of the Tamil Nadu P.C.C. to 'change their heart' towards Rajaji and secure his cooperation; and expressing "gratitude to the Congress Working Committee for sending Janab Asaf Ali to settle the confusion and differences among Congressmen in Tamil Nadu."

At the conclusion of his enquiry, Asaf Ali said in his award: "After a careful consideration of all the evidence produced before me I find that the D.C.C. of Salem and the Taluk Congress Committee of Tiruchengodu as elected in 1940 had not ceased to exist up to September 1945...It is also proved by the documents and oral evidence produced before me that the election of a member of the P.C.C. from the Tiruchengodu Taluk did actually take place...No election dispute can be taken cognisance of by either the Provincial Committee or its executive or by any subordinate Committee. According to Article 11-B of the Congress Constitution, 'until the election is set aside by the election tribunal, the person elected shall be deemed to have been duly elected.' Consequently,

until Mr. C. Rajagopalachari's election is set aside by a duly constituted district tribunal, he shall be deemed to have been duly elected as a member of the P.C.C. and the member co-opted in his place shall vacate his seat forthwith."

This finding overturned the action of K. Kamaraj. However, Asaf Ali exonerated Kamaraj of mala fide in another complaint filed by V.K. Venugopalan and G. Rangaswami Reddi, members of the Provincial Congress Committee. Asaf Ali's award said: "Mr. K. Nadar, president of the T.N.C.C., has now examined all the documents including the P.C.C.'s minutes book, and he frankly admits that his impression that these gentlemen had ceased to be members of the P.C.C. was due to a bona fide error of judgement...Under the circumstances, although their exclusion from the last meeting of the P.C.C. is regrettable, I am not prepared to hold that Mr. Kamaraja Nadar's action on that account was mala fide. Messrs V.K. Venugopalan and G. Rangawami Reddi shall be deemed as regular members of the P.C.C. and those who were co-opted from their district in their place, under a wrong impression, shall vacate their seats on the Tamil Nadu P.C.C. forthwith."

### **Defence of Sheikh Abdullah**

After the I.N.A. trials, Asaf Ali's next legal assignment in the public cause took him to Kashmir.

When the British Cabinet mission arrived in India early in 1945, Congress sympathy with the efforts of the people of the princely States in India to secure democratic self-government was symbolised by Jawaharlal Nehru's presidentship of the All India States Peoples Conference. The vice president was Sheikh Abdullah, leader of the National Conference of Jammu and Kashmir.

Sheikh Abdullah sent a telegram to the Cabinet Mission in which he referred to the Treaty of Amritsar (1846) as a 'sale deed' under which the "land and people of Kashmir were sold away to servitude of Dogra house by British for 75 lakhs of Sikh rupees equivalent to 50 lakh British Indian rupees". (Sheikh Abdullah worked out the arithmetic as the Kashmiris being sold to the Dogras at seven pice per head.) The telegram went on to say: "We declare to world that this sale deed confers no privileges equivalent to those claimed by States governed by treaty rights. As such, case of Kashmir stands on unique footing and people of Kashmir press on Mission their unchallengeable claims to freedom on withdrawal of British power from India...People of Kashmir are determined to mould their own destiny."

Though there was nothing in this to suggest that Sheikh Abdullah wanted Kashmir to be part of India in the event of partition, and on the contrary there was a clear hint of desire for independent status, Jawaharlal Nehru said in the course of a statement to the Press: "In regard to the Treaty of Amritsar, as in

regard to other treaties between the East Indian Company or the British Government and the States, it has been our policy throughout that these treaties are completely out of date and must be ended. It is true that special stress was laid on the abrogation of the Treaty of Amritsar in the telegram sent by him (Sheikh Abdullah) to the British Cabinet Delegation. This telegram and memorandum later came to be represented by the 'Quit Kashmir' slogan...What is asked for in Kashmir is the rule of the people. This is the identical demand in all the States, as in the rest of India. The people of Kashmir have no desire to isolate themselves from India and coming changes in India. Inevitably these changes will affect Kashmir and presumably Kashmir State will be a federating unit in the Indian Union...The cry of 'Quit Kashmir' means the ending of autocratic rule in Kashmir. It refers to constitutional development on a democratic basis, that is, full responsible government, His Highness continuing as constitutional head of the State. That is the present position. What the future will be will depend inevitably on the feelings and will of the people."

Much happened from the second half of May 1946 to draw public attention to Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah was arrested by the Maharaja's administration on 20th May 1946 at Ghari, 100 miles from Srinagar, while on his way to Delhi for consultations at Jawaharlal Nehru's invitation. Abdullah's trial, on the charge of sedition, was to commence on 1st July 1946. Jawaharlal Nehru decided to head a team of lawyers to assist in the defence of Sheikh Abdullah. Asaf Ali and Diwan Chaman Lal were to conduct the defence, and accompanied Nehru. The party proceeded by plane to Lahore and thence to Rawalpindi. From there they travelled by the Rawalpindi-Srinagar road which was at that time the principal communication link with the valley of Kashmir. They were detained on the way and held in detention at the Uri dak bungalow. A telephone call from Viceroy's House in New Delhi, at the instance of Maulana Azad who as Congress President needed Nehru's presence in Delhi during the negotiations for the transfer of power, quickly brought to heel the Maharaja's administration.

Nehru and party were taken to Srinagar, where they met Sheikh Abdullah, and discussed with him the line of approach of the defence when his case came up in court. While Nehru flew to Delhi, Asaf Ali stayed back for some days in Srinagar. He spoke to newspapermen, during an interview on 13th July, of the 'strategic importance of Kashmir in any scheme for the defence of India as a whole'. He said that India could not afford to have a Kashmir which was not fully contented and enthusiastically cooperative. He also pleaded for a constitutional monarchy in Kashmir. The slogan of Quit Kashmir, Asaf Ali said, had "no significance other than the rectification of an untenable position, and the establishment of a sound relationship between a constitutional monarch and the people from whom he should derive his title and power." Asaf Ali thus spoke in the same strain as Jawaharlal Nehru. On his way back (the hearing of the



Abdullah case having been adjourned), Asaf Ali was to encounter at Rawalpindi a familiar colonial-racist situation. The *Hindustan Times* of 17th July 1946 carried under the caption 'NO ROOM FOR ASAF ALI' a report from Rawalpindi dated 16th July:

"Congressmen cannot be allowed to reside in this hotel which is reserved for military personnel; the reservation was a mistake." Thus said the old Anglo-Indian manageress of the Metropole Hotel, Rawalpindi Cantonment, to Mr. Asaf Ali on his arrival from Srinagar on Sunday at the hotel where a room had been booked in advance for him.

"In vain did Mr. Abdul Latif, who accompanied Mr. Asaf Ali from Srinagar, try to argue with the old woman. The best she could offer him was a room which Mr. Asaf Ali described as unfit for human habitation...He had to go to another hotel."

Asaf Ali went again to Kashmir for the resumed hearing of Sheikh Abdullah's case. On 16th August 1946, he said in the court that by 'Quit Kashmir' Sheikh Abdullah meant only full responsible government. The intention was not that His Highness should bodily disappear from Kashmir. Asaf Ali argued that to plead for the abolition of autocracy was no sedition. As he was speaking, there was a deafening noise of machine gun fire outside. On enquiry it was found that a senior military officer from British India was visiting the Badami Bagh cantonment and a field demonstration was being held for inspection by him. The Brigade Officer told the court that it would last only about 15 minutes; at Asaf Ali's suggestion the court adjourned.

In the course of the trial, Sheikh Abdullah read out in court a statement which had been drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru and Asaf Ali. It read: "I have pleaded not guilty to the charge of 'sedition' which, according to jurists, is a crime against society, and I stand by whatever I have said or written in regard to the fundamental right of the people of Jammu & Kashmir...I have maintained a clear and strict distinction between persons and politics, between individuals and the system of government which they operate, and I would not allow any undignified or indecent reference to, or vulgar abuse of, anyone anywhere. I have, however, all along sought the alteration of policies and measures and vital changes of the system of government by legitimate and civilised means. For it is the birthright of man to shape and mould the law by which he must live..."

"I am not interested in a personal defence and I would not have undertaken it if I had not felt that my trial for 'sedition' is something far more than a personal charge against me. It is, in effect, a trial of the entire population of J & K..."

"There is the tribunal of human conscience, which judges the rulers and the ruled alike by standards which do not change by the arbitrary will of the most powerful. To that law I gladly submit. And that tribunal I shall face with confidence and without fear, leaving it to history and posterity to pronounce

their verdict on the claims I and my colleagues have made not merely on behalf of the four million people of J & K but also of the 93 million people of all the States in India.

"Some allegations have been made that 'Quit Kashmir' and the demand for abrogation of the Treaty of Amritsar had communal or Communist inspiration. This is a travesty of fact and I deny and repudiate these allegations." <sup>4</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah was eventually sentenced to imprisonment for nine years. But a rapid turn of events, starting with the attack on the State by raiders from Pakistan, led to his release on 29th September 1947 and culminated in his appointment on 31st October as head of the Emergency Administration of Jammu & Kashmir.

While Asaf Ali was in Srinagar conducting the defence of Sheikh Abdullah, he received a telephone call from New Delhi towards the close of August 1946 summoning him in connection with political negotiations that were then under way. Asaf Ali therefore wound up his argument, and left the rest to a Kashmiri colleague, Jailal Kilam who was later to become a judge of the State High Court.

### **Provisional Cabinet**

The political negotiations which made Asaf Ali hurry back from Srinagar to Delhi in the last week of August 1946 had begun in May that year, following the arrival of the Cabinet Mission sent to India by the new Labour Government of Britain.

In a letter to Maulana Azad on 30th May 1946, the Viceroy dealt with the demand of the Congress that there must be a legal and constitutional change to give the proposed Interim Government the status of a truly national government. Wavell stated that there could be no change in the Constitution until a new one was framed, but assured the Congress President of every possible help and freedom to the new government and promised to refrain from interference in the day-to-day administration. This was similar to the assurance given by the Secretary of State for India in respect of provincial Ministries in 1937.

With the election of Jawaharlal Nehru early in July 1946 to succeed Maulana Azad as Congress President, the negotiations with the Viceroy were pursued by Nehru. The basis being considered was five members of the Interim Government from the Congress; five from the Muslim League; one Sikh and one Christian or Anglo-Indian. Nehru had held talks with Jinnah on this basis, and the outcome of these talks was reviewed at an interview between the Viceroy and Nehru on 17th August 1946. According to a record of this interview by Wavell, Jinnah had asked how the minorities would be nominated; and Nehru said that as he (Nehru, as Congress President) had been asked to make proposals, he would naturally suggest names of minority representatives for the

Viceroi's consideration. Jinnah then complained that under the proposed arrangement it would be open to Congress to nominate a non-League Muslim. Nehru replied that he did not see how the League could object if it came out of the Congress quota. He said that Jinnah then embarked on a long historical review to show that all Muslims must belong to the League. Nehru said that his impression was that Jinnah had gone rather farther than he had intended and was at a loss how to get out.

Wavell's record goes on to say: "I then asked him (Nehru) what his proposals were about the formation of an Interim Government. He said that the idea was to propose to me the names of six Congress nominees and three minority representatives, and to fill the five Muslim seats with neutral Muslims. I suggested the possibility of leaving them (the five Muslim seats) open for acceptance by the Muslim League, but he said that he did not like this idea, as it would give to the Government the appearance of instability. I then asked him (Nehru) about the Muslims. He gave me a list of about ten names, all of whom, except Asaf Ali, were unknown to me, and I should judge, non-entities."

On 20th August 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the Viceroy conveying 14 names for the Interim Government: "In consultation with my colleagues I am suggesting the names given below for membership of the Interim Government. If the list is to contain only 14 names, then I am afraid there will be no room in it at present for an Anglo-Indian...We have secured the consent of all except one, Mr. Asaf Ali, whom we have not able to contact. He has been in Kashmir and is on his way back. Apparently been he has been held up somewhere owing to a stoppage of the air service. We hope to be in touch with him soon.

"I have decided to join the provisional government myself. In addition to my name, therefore, there will be the following:

1. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.
2. Dr. Rajendra Prasad
3. M. Asaf Ali
4. C. Rajagopalachari
5. Fazlul Huq
6. Sarat Chandra Bose
7. Dr. John Mathai
8. Sardar Baldev Singh
9. Sir Shafaat Ahmad Khan
10. Jagjivan Ram (President, All India Depressed Classes League)
11. Syed Ali Zaheer (President, All India Shia Conference)
12. Mr. Cooverji Hormusji Bhabha
13. (A Muslim name to be supplied later); and
14. Frank Anthony (President, Anglo-Indian Association)."

Regarding the designation of the Executive Council to be reconstituted in the new political context as the prelude to a transfer of power, Jawaharlal Nehru

wrote to Wavell on 1st September 1946: "We would prefer to call it the provisional national government, but if you think that interim government is more suitable at present we have no objection. But in any event it would be undesirable to refer to it as the Governor General's Executive Council. In any official announcements or references to be made to it, it should be called either the provisional government or the interim government. You have yourself referred to it as such, and in the intimation conveyed to us of the King's approval of our appointment it is stated that we are members of the interim government.

"This government will function as a Cabinet and will be jointly responsible for its decisions."

Lord Wavell's acceptance of this position marked a significant change from rejection of the concept of joint responsibility, in April 1942, by Sir Stafford Cripps who said it would amount to "absolute dictatorship of the majority" and would be unacceptable to the minorities in India.

However, the Interim Government which was sworn in on 22nd September 1946 could function as a team, like a Cabinet, only for a few weeks. When the Muslim League joined the Government on 26th October the Cabinet became a house divided. The League claimed that it was no Cabinet at all. Jinnah said tauntingly that he wished Jawaharlal Nehru would realise that he was not Prime Minister but only a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council holding the portfolios of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations.

### **No More 'Hindu Pani, Muslim Pani'**

Asaf Ali along with Maulana Azad had already been included by the Congress, in a list of suggested members of a similar Interim Government that Lord Wavell had hoped to form a whole year earlier, when he held talks at Simla with leaders of the principal political parties in June 1945. But Jinnah insisted that there should be no Muslim in the Government other than a nominee of the Muslim League. Wavell had at that time permitted himself to be thus vetoed. This time the Viceroy stood firm. When the Muslim League joined the Government in October 1946, it had to lump the presence in it of a nationalist Muslim in the person of Asaf Ali. Khan Wali Khan recalls : "Another issue was that no Muslims other than ones belonging to the Muslim League could sit in the Central Cabinet. Barrister Asaf Ali remained a Minister in the Central Cabinet."<sup>5</sup>

Asaf Ali's membership of the Interim Government was to prove as significant in human as in political terms. For long years the British Indian administration of India had been flaunting, inciting and aggravating the division of Indian society into Hindu and Muslim, and of Hindu society into numerous castes (some of them regarded as untouchable). Typical of the joy with which the British publicised the divisions in Indian society were the annual reports of

the Ministry of Transport and of the Railway Board. The report of the Railway Board for 1939-40 sets out in graphic detail the arrangements for "Refreshment Rooms for Hindus and Mahomedans":

| <i>RAILWAY</i>                 | <i>Hindu &amp;<br/>Muslim</i> | <i>Hindu<br/>Only</i> | <i>Musalman<br/>Only</i> |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Great Indian Peninsular        | 6                             | 1                     |                          |
| Madras & Southern Mahratta     | 5                             | 22*                   |                          |
| Bombay, Baroda & Central India | 1                             | 11                    |                          |
| South Indian                   | —                             | 30                    |                          |

- \* Hindu refreshment rooms, though run on Hindu lines, supplying vegetarian Hindu food, are open to other communities also.

The annual report of the Railway Board also informs us that there was a 'Christian' refreshment room at Mormugao Harbour. There were "Indian restaurant cars (for lower class passengers) with separate kitchens for Hindus and Mahomedans" on certain trains. These amusing details did reflect social reality. Their narration in such detail in government reports served to reinforce social divisions, to the political advantage of the foreign rulers.

Gandhiji wrote in *Harijan* under the title 'Hindu Pani and Muslim Pani' that its continuance "would be repulsive, now that the Government at the Centre is wholly national and a well-known Indian in the person of Asaf Ali Saheb is in charge of transport and railways. It is to be hoped that we shall soon have the last of the shame that is peculiarly Indian...Thanks, we still breathe the same air, walk on the same mother earth. All communal cries, at least at the railway stations, should be unlawful."

If the Interim Government accomplished little else, the abolition of the obnoxious cry of 'Hindu Pani' and 'Muslim Pani', initiated by it, was a notable gain.

## Towards Self-Reliance

As Minister of Transport and Railways in the Interim Government, Asaf Ali took great interest in the project for the indigenous manufacture of railway engines and rolling stock. The establishment of a locomotive workshop was part of the planning that was already under way for post-war development, and Asaf Ali gave it a fillip. Kailash Nath Katju, as Governor of West Bengal, writes to his brother Governor of Orissa on 7th August 1951:

"My dear Asaf Ali,

I am dictating this letter in Chittaranjan, where I came on Friday last for an extended week-end and am leaving this afternoon. I wish you could come

here for a short visit of inspection. It will delight you.

"I imagine you already know something about it, as you must have dealt with it when you were a Minister in the Central Cabinet. It is Jamshedpur in miniature, with really some extra points in its favour. Three years ago, this area, nearly eight square miles in extent, was sheer jungle with some four Santhal villages scattered upon it with a very scanty population. In the course of three years, engineers--all Indian--have turned it almost into a fairy land with an expenditure of over fifteen crores of rupees spent on locomotive workshops and quarters and other amenities for the staff working here. It is a township of 20,000 souls with every prospect of increasing to 50,000 in a few years.

"Chittaranjan, named after C.R.Das, is delightfully situated. It reminds me of the Malwa Plateau, my own home with its wide prospects. The eye roams over miles and miles of hills and dales on all sides of the horizon. It is dry and healthy and its breezes are gentle and cool. Both climatically and spiritually it is peaceful. People are all employed and therefore contented. Quarters for the staff, particularly the lowest paid, are ample and well built, and there are recreation halls and schools and dispensaries and shopping centres in all of the four colonies into which the township is divided. I am staying here in the Guest House, comfortable and simply built. It is a real achievement of the three years of our freedom.

"The President, when he came here in November last, started an engine in the workshop, which had been assembled in India with all its component parts imported from abroad. Within a year, on Saturday the 4th instant, I started an engine in which half of the parts--and the total comprised 5300--were built in India. All the workers in the workshop were visibly proud of their achievement. In another two years' time they look forward to building a complete locomotive in India. The workshops have been exceptionally well built and planned on very generous lines, and I am not surprised that engineers who come from abroad to Chittaranjan are filled with a little envy."

The reference in this letter, written in 1951, is to steam locomotives. That they have been almost completely phased out in India and replaced by diesel and electric locomotives is a measure of the technological change over the last four decades.

## NOTES

1. Gandhiji-Jinnah Correspondence, 1944, Vol.78, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*.
2. The 16 members were: Lord Wavell, Commander-in-Chief and War Member; Sir Firoze Khan Noon (Defence); Nalini Ranjan Sarkar (Commerce); Sir Hormusji P. Mody (Supply); Sir Sultan Ahmed (Law); Sir Reginald Maxwell (Home); Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar (India's representative at the British War

Cabinet), Dr B R Ambedkar (Labour), Sir E C Benthall (War Transport), Sir Jeremy Raisman (Finance); Sir Mohammad Usman (Posts and Air), M.S. Aney (Indians Overseas); Sir J P Srivastava (Civil Defence); Sir Jogendra Singh (Education, Health and Lands), Sir Akbar Hydari (Information and Broadcasting), and E Raghavendra Rao (Civil Defence).

- 3 Jawaharlal Nehru quoted in *India's Struggle for Independence: Visuals and Documents*, National Council of Educational Research & Training, 1985.
4. *The Tribune*, Lahore, 7th August 1946.
- 5 *Facts are Facts: the Untold Story of India's Partition*, tr by Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, Vikas, 1987.

## 10. Interpreting India Abroad

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Several entries in Asaf Ali's Prison Diary, recording his reaction to the developing war situation and his appraisal of the American attitude to India, are of interest in relation to his then undreamt of role as the first ambassador to America from an India in transition to independence. Asaf Ali writes:

*29th September 1942.* Representatives of both Indian and foreign journalists have sent to the Viceroy a memorandum complaining of senseless censorship of all outgoing and incoming news. Among them are American and British journalists, including the representative of the London *Times*. Certain American correspondents had to fly to Chungking to cable to their country news of the Indian situation.

It is obvious that the British bureaucrats in India have sought to deceive America into a false sense of security by suppressing the fact that their shortsighted policy has resulted in a betrayal of America's vital interest in India as the indispensable strategic base for operations against the Japanese.

*3rd October 1942.* It is becoming increasingly clear that the pronouncements of Churchill, Amery & Co. about India are designed to mislead America particularly. They seem determined to defy international opinion and retain their stranglehold on India. If certain newspaper reports are correct, America has not been taken in.

*13th October 1942.* In yesterday's newspapers I came across a statement by Sumner Welles, the U.S. Secretary of State, in which he elucidates America's peace aims. These include the freedom of all peoples throughout the world. Raw materials, he says, should be available to all "in the open market", and therefore no colonial possessions--either for the Axis powers or, I take it, for the Allies. Those who are in a position to export manufactured goods should be able to obtain raw materials in exchange. But Welles unfortunately states this proposition in the reverse



order, and uses the imperative in respect of the raw material producing countries. They must, he says, accept manufactured goods and services for raw materials. Surely this is not exchange in an open market.

If the market for raw and manufactured goods are to be 'open', naturally the buyers will insist on the best material for the cheapest price and the seller will expect the highest price he can obtain. In such a competition, if there is no coercion and no exclusion of certain countries, India may not be a loser even if she continues to produce and export only raw materials in the main. But India must become a manufacturing country also. Therefore the over-simplified statement of Welles does not appeal to me.

*3rd November 1942.* Americans are taking an intelligent and growing interest in the Middle East, Russia, China and India as the strategic bases and theatres of action which will decide the final issue of war. Wendell Wilkie has, after his extensive tour (British diplomacy prevented him from visiting India--which is wrapped round with a blanket of censorship), addressed his people, and indirectly all the peoples of the world, in a sagaciously outspoken manner. He has invited their attention to the widely entertained doubts and fears regarding Britain's attitude to India and the East, including Russia. Britain has churlishly resented this--churlishly because but for America and Russia, Britain would have been wiped right off the world's map a year ago.

So the U.S.A. has after all begun to stir, about India. The most piquant indication is a series of articles by Louis Fischer. He has ably exposed the hypocrisy and high-handedness of Churchill, Amery & Co. Truth is beginning to emerge from across the Atlantic, and the smokescreens which the British imperialists had thrown between India and the world are disappearing.

*4th November 1942 :* If India continues to be a millstone round the Allied neck, the issue of the war in 1943 or even 1944 is in grave doubt. The greatest sufferer will be the U.S.A., due to the drain of material and men in more theatres of war than she can easily manage.

On a long-range view, the British Empire's day is over. America will, henceforward, be the big noise in the West, and Russia will probably influence the destiny of Europe far more effectively than any other European country--unless, of course the Axis wins the war. Personally I have no doubt that while 1943 will prove the most disastrous year of the war to all concerned, Germany and her associates will hardly survive the strain. And when Germany slows down, Russia and no other country will begin to affect the thoughts and fortunes of Europe. Virtually all of Europe from Moscow to Madrid may pass into the domain of Communism. The fate of the Middle East, China and India also will be profoundly affected by such a development, resulting in a fresh orientation of international combinations.

## British Propaganda in U.S.A.

If a section of the American intelligentsia were favourably disposed towards the Indian National Congress and the cause of Indian freedom, it was despite the sustained efforts of British imperialist propaganda during the war years in the U.S.A. A leading part in this propaganda campaign was played by Girija Shankar Bajpai, who had been appointed in 1941 as Agent General in Washington by the British government of India.

In a study of the American role in the last phase of India's freedom struggle, the authors say: "American opinion, reflecting the pervasive sentiment of comradeship with Britain and concern over the advance of the Japanese, had been overwhelmingly, indeed almost unanimously, favourable to the British point of view--a process that was assiduously promoted by the tireless efforts of (British ambassador) Lord Halifax's Information Services...His Lordship and the British Government were served with dedication and vigour by a 'loyal' Indian civil servant, Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, who had been named Agent-General of India at Washington...

"From the Agency General there flowed out a remarkable quantity of propaganda material in the shape of 'background notes' and 'newsletters'. Interestingly enough, certain books by British, American and Indian writers that were sharply critical of Gandhi and the Congress, and appreciative of the British record in India, attained wide distribution in the U.S. during this period...Lecture tours were arranged for pro-British Indian nationals like Sir Samuel Runganathan; and Sir Mohammed Zafrullah Khan and Begum Shah Nawaz put across the 'Muslim point of view'."<sup>1</sup>

However, President Roosevelt's own Personal Representative in India, William Phillips, said in a secret memorandum to his principal: "India is not heart and soul in this war. She is not even a passive ally--she is merely passive...the Indians have no part in the government and hence no voice or responsibility...Some move or gesture by the U.S. should be made which will bring India more enthusiastically into the war. Until they are made to feel that the United Nations war aims apply to them also, the Indians will continue to feel that the war is not theirs. Since, in my opinion, the major burden of defeating Japan is going to fall on us, the desirability of having India on our side is obvious, as is also the legitimacy of our interest in bringing this about."

The American newspaper columnist Drew Pearson quoted this document in his column published on 24th July 1944, whereupon he and his source, Senator Chandler, were named *persona non grata* in London. Reacting to this, Republican Congressman Calvin D. Johnson of Illinois introduced in the House on 30th August 1944 a resolution which supported the Indian of independence and said inter alia: "Resolved, That it  
British Minister for India in Washington,

Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai, and Sir Ronald Campbell (Minister in the British Embassy in Washington) who have endeavoured to influence the views of the American Press regarding India, shall be declared *persona non grata* to the Government of the U.S., should they continue in their efforts..."

The choice of Asaf Ali to head the first foreign embassy of an India poised to become independent was a signal distinction. Few knew at the time that Jawaharlal Nehru had some misgiving about Asaf Ali's effectiveness. Nehru gave expression to this while replying to a communication from his sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit, at that time leading India's delegation to the U.N., in which she had apparently questioned the choice of Asaf Ali for Washington. Nehru wrote to her on 5th December 1946: "Yesterday I received your cable about Asaf Ali...I have already indicated to you the reason for making these various arrangements. They are not exactly as I would like them to be, but in view of the circumstances prevailing in India, this was the best arrangement. This applies also about Asaf Ali's appointment in Washington. He is a somewhat ineffective person and I had at first not agreed to his going there. I entirely agree with you on this point. But on full consideration and in view of other opinions and factors I decided to take this step. I shall try to give him an efficient understudy. For my part I should like Bajpai to continue for some time at least as the next senior man in the Embassy. Whether Bajpai agrees to this or not I do not know. I feel, as you do, that in spite of his past, Bajpai is a man of considerable ability which should be used by us, how exactly I am not quite sure. I am writing to him a few lines myself and you can tell him also that I have every wish to utilise his services for important work."

Asaf Ali knew neither that Nehru considered him 'ineffective' nor that he had requested Girija Shankar Bajpai, of all people, to make up for the perceived deficiency by assisting Asaf Ali as second-in-command at Washington. Jawaharlal Nehru's letters to Mrs. Pandit and to Bajpai were made public for the first time in 1984.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of his letter of 5th December 1946, Nehru says to Bajpai : "You know that we have chosen Asaf Ali as our Ambassador for Washington. I suppose he will be going there some time in January. We are anxious to have public men as our Ambassadors as far as possible, more especially in regard to our first appointments. I hope you do not think that this is in any way a slight on you. I have not agreed with much you have done in the past, as indeed I do not agree with what might be considered the ICS outlook on anything. I definitely think that every effort will have to be made to get rid of this ICS outlook in India insofar as our Indian civilians are concerned. The British civilians will, of course, have to go. I feel, however that you as well as many others, though not all, have not only ability but are quite capable of adapting yourself to the new India that is taking shape. This new India will lack, above everything, trained human material to begin with.

"I am quite sure that we shall require your services for important and responsible work, where and how I do not know just at present. As you must know, we are passing through difficult times in India and the future is rather vague and uncertain. In these circumstances it is not easy to make plans too far ahead. Still plans have to be made and will be made.

"I was thinking that it might be desirable, if you agree to it, for you to continue at Washington as Asaf Ali's second in command. I suppose this would mean the post of Counsellor though I am not fully acquainted with the hierarchy. If a Minister's position is higher than that of a Counsellor, then you could occupy that. There is not much in a name. The point is that I should like you to be there for some time at least to be next to Asaf Ali in the Embassy. You are fully acquainted with American conditions and ways as well as with the technique of the work, and you could be of great help to Asaf Ali who will be now to the task. This arrangement could continue till some new arrangement is made for you. It will be a pity for you to do nothing at all, just waiting for things to happen. I am writing this on my own personal initiative as the idea struck me the other day. I have not put this to my Department yet.'

In the event, Bajpai did not stay on at Washington and his place was taken as Minister in the Embassy (on the upgradation of the Agent General's office) by B.R.Sen. Bajpai went to Delhi where, after a spell as Officer on Special Duty, he was made Secretary-General of the External Affairs Department. This appointment caused consternation in Congress circles, specially on the part of those like Aruna Asaf Ali who belonged to the left wing. She recalls that on her expressing surprise that an official so closely identified with the former regime should be given such an important position, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke of Bajpai's high ability and expressed his conviction that he would serve the new regime with equal loyalty.

The main reason for Asaf Ali leaving the Interim Government within months of taking charge of the portfolio of Railways and Transport was that room had to be found, within the Congress quota, for inducting Maulana Azad into the Cabinet. He had not joined the Interim Government when it was initially constituted without representatives of the Muslim League, on the ground (in his own words) that "at least one senior Congress leader should remain outside the Government." The situation changed when the Muslim League joined the Government on 26th October 1946, though continuing to boycott the Constituent Assembly. Azad assumed office on 15th January 1947, with charge of the Education portfolio.

On the reactions to his appointment as ambassador to Washington, Asaf Ali writes:

Delhi, my home town, was almost convulsed with elation at the news of my appointment as Ambassador to Washington. For nearly three weeks I

was guest of honour almost daily at receptions organised among others by the Delhi Municipality, the Bar Association, the Chamber of Commerce and Delhi Muslims. At these functions there would be much encomia and garlanding. I was deeply touched by this demonstration of affection and trust, but I felt chastened by the thought that there were several persons who could have filled this office with conspicuous ability. There were Sarojini Naidu and Vijayalakshmi Pandit, both of whom had scored much applause during lecture tours in the States. Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar was a well known figure in international conferences, with sterling worth as a temperate and circumspect representative. Among others were men of such distinction as Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy of Bengal. The choice, however, fell on me for a variety of reasons. An important one, I imagine, was that at the time the Congress wanted to prove to the world that its profession of large-heartedness in politics, observing no distinction between Hindus, Muslims or others, was not mere lip service to high principles. I cannot, however, help noting the fact that my appointment caused some heart-burning in certain quarters, the repercussions of which I was to face later.

### **Briefing by Gandhiji and Nehru**

Almost immediately after the announcement, I decided to seek the blessings and advice of Mahatma Gandhi. He was at the time touring Noakhali, carrying his noble mission of Hindu-Muslim concord into the very heart of the area where it had suffered a shocking setback. My meeting with Gandhiji at that time is one of the most memorable experiences of my life. I sought him out in Srirampur, in the interior of Noakhali, after travelling by air, jeep and on foot for many hours. He was camping in a small hut in the midst of many others which had suffered seriously during the communal riots. He received me at once, and for a full hour and a half he admitted none else. He unbosomed himself to me as he had never done before. I was deeply moved, and felt certain that the purity and high nobility of his spirit could not fail to subdue the communal frenzy. I had a discussion with him about my mission to the United States, and sought his guidance in respect of certain questions. I quote below the letters in which Gandhiji summarised his advice.

18.12.1946

"My dear Asaf,

Here is the letter I drafted, and a copy typed and signed. You make what use you like of it. May I suggest that if you have not, you should now pick up the Hindi and Urdu forms of Hindustani in both the scripts--Nagri and

Urdu. Herewith the letters for Aruna and Jawaharlal.  
I am glad you came.

Yours,  
Bapu."

Srirampur  
17.12.1946

"Dear Asaf Ali,

You are an old and seasoned Congressman. I know how you stood in the estimation of the late lamented Hakim Sahib Ajmal Khan and Dr. Ansari and what value Maulana Abul Kalam Azad puts on you, not to mention the many important Hindu and other friends you have. It is well therefore that the Interim Government of India has chosen you as its first Ambassador in America. India has a right to expect you to represent the combined culture India's many religions represent. What is perhaps more, you will represent simple living and high thinking for which the National Congress stands and of which you are a distinguished member.

Yours sincerely,  
M.K.Gandhi"

I deeply regret to confess that 'simple living' in the States was my despair, and later on I had another letter from him in which he reproved me in his charmingly devastating way, merely by saying: "I hear you are not living as you were expected to. Can it be?"

Gandhiji's advice on certain points regarding which Asaf Ali sought guidance was conveyed in the following letter:

Srirampur  
19.12.1946

"Respected Asaf Ali Saheb,

I am enclosing herewith Gandhiji's answers to the questions sent by you through Pyarelalji. Please drop a line acknowledging receipt of same.

Yours sincerely,  
R.P. Parasuram.

"1. *Use of the National Flag*: As to the National Flag, my opinion is that whilst we are part of the British Dominions it is but right and proper that in the Ambassador's office in America the Union Jack is flown side by side with the National Flag. In view of the Muslim League's revolt, I would go so far as to question the prudence of flying in America the Congress Flag as our National Flag. But it is a ticklish question and you should ask, on this and the other questions, for the instructions of the Interim Government, not merely of Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru. Every Ambassador carries written instructions within which he is bound to act. These he can neither diminish nor extend.

"2. *Use of the Union Jack*: As to the second, India as she is at present cannot omit the Union Jack in foreign countries. Take instructions.

"3. *The National Anthem* : As to the third there is a new British National Anthem, omitting all the objectionable words. I have no doubt that what was done in England only recently can be safely done by the Indian Ambassador in America. Whether we can sing Vande Mataram or Jai Hind or the Tricolour song at the same time should be decided by the Interim Government.

"4. *Use of Hindustani as the National Language*: The Ambassador's speeches where audiences are purely or predominantly Indian should be in Hindustani first, and he can translate the same into English whenever occasion requires it. For pure American audiences speeches should be only in English. It would be pompous and unreal to deliver before American audiences speeches first in Hindustani and then translations in English. It should be remembered that the most polished ambassadors have read their speeches which they have prepared or have been prepared for them in advance."

Continuing the account of his preparation for the diplomatic assignment, Asaf Ali writes:

The reply from Gandhiji answered some of the most ticklish questions which had formed themselves in my mind. We had at that time no flag of our own, no national anthem, and no diplomatic dress had been prescribed. Nor was it quite clear whether we like other nations would employ our national language in international forums like the United Nations Organisation.

When I started taking stock of the office in Washington of which I was to be the head, the records in the External Affairs Department gave me only the barest outlines of the staff and the Ambassador's residence. The information included a warning that I would find no cutlery and possibly a limited quantity of crockery in the Ambassador's residence because my predecessor, the Agent General, had been using his own cutlery etc. and therefore I would be required to purchase certain purchases straightaway. This was a trifling detail. What I was anxious to find out was whether there was a Manual of Business or any useful administration reports which might give me a background of the work already done. Unluckily, the information was not available for the reason that as India was a dependency, India's External Affairs were under the control of the British Foreign Office and even India's own Foreign Office was under a somewhat limited government. The only person who was in touch with the British Government was the Agent General, who was based locally at a distance. I was told that the Agent General had been spending much of his time in the United States (Baird) and

reading them I was struck by his fine power of observation. I had known him when he was a student and a candidate for the Indian Civil Service in England. Subsequently I saw him at close quarters for a number of years in the Central Legislative Assembly of which he was an official member. The Prime Minister was a much harrassed person at the time and I greatly hesitated to cut into his time. I therefore tried to obtain from the Department as much as possible of the information I wanted. The Secretary, Weightman, told me that at the time of presenting my letters of credence I would be expected to make a speech, to which the U.S. President would reply. But Weightman added that he was really not familiar with all the diplomatic ceremonials on these occasions and perhaps the British Ambassador at Washington, Lord Inverchapel, would be the best person to refer to. I myself made the suggestion that I might be given a Counsellor from amongst the experienced senior officers of the Government to manage the administrative side of the Embassy. I had heard from various persons who had visited Washington all sorts of accounts of the attitude and capacity of the various officers who were at the time working in the Chancery. Later on I discovered that many of the reports which were being poured into my ears by all and sundry who had visited the States were no more than the rumours which are the staple of traveller's tales.

In my enthusiasm to revive the ancient Indian tradition of sending suitable presents with the Ambassador to the Head of the State to which he was accredited, I thought of taking some rare Kashmir shawls. When I mentioned it to the Prime Minister he did not give me a positive reply, but since he did not appear to be disinclined, the next day when we met in his room to discuss various matters concerning the Embassy, I brought up the question of presents also. In the meanwhile I had acquired some Kashmir shawls of the finest quality from a dealer who probably was not fully aware of their value, and I had taken them to show to Jawaharlal Nehru. The shawls were admired by the Prime Minister and also by Weightman, but the latter politely told me that the modern practice was against the old tradition. He referred to an occasion or two when certain presents proposed to be sent to Kabul and Tibet or the reverse were vetoed, and so I dropped my proposal. But I had taken such a fancy to these shawls that I acquired them on my own at the cost of almost all my savings at that time, and did take them to Washington where they were displayed in the Embassy to the admiring gaze of many.

Another little troublesome question was that inasmuch as the diplomats' activities included a great deal of mutual entertainment--receptions, cocktail parties, etc.--would it be necessary for me to have an official hostess, because my wife was not accompanying me at the time? Weightman said that the usual practice in this respect was that the senior lady of the



Ambassador's staff was generally requested to perform the duties of the hostess. He added: "Of course you will decide for yourself when you go there, but you have among your officers one whose wife has a flair for this kind of social activity and who is admirably equipped for it as she is an accomplished lady who can speak English and French fluently." This was the Egyptian wife of the First Secretary, Osmanali Baig, the late Sir Abbasali Baig's son. The Counsellor's wife--who would be the seniormost lady--was yet to go to Washington.

After giving over charge of the Transport Portfolio, I met the Cabinet Ministers individually to discuss with them their problems in relation to the Washington mission. In my talks with the Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, I told him that I was seriously thinking of Indianising the entire set-up of the Embassy, which, according to my information at the time, was overwhelmingly staffed by Canadian girl clerks and typists. He wholeheartedly agreed and promised to help me. The role of the Information Division of the Embassy came up. He told me he had rather disappointing reports of the Information Division and I should take early steps to suggest its reorganisation. When saying goodbye to me, Sardar was visibly moved.

Another important talk I had was with Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck. We talked for about an hour and a half about the Indian Army which was one of my pet subjects, about strategical problems in general and eventually about the Military Attache. The traveller's tales to which I have already referred had made him out to be an undesirable officer. He was Lt. Col Sher Ali Khan, younger brother of the Nawab of Pataudi, who in Auchinleck's opinion was a smart and capable officer. I told Auchinleck that I would keep my mind open and would let him know what I thought about him. In the general conversation which we had about the relations between the Ambassador and the Military Attache, Field Marshal Auchinleck told me that the Military Attache's set-up, though within the orbit of the Embassy, dealt directly with the Defence Department. I emphatically disagreed with this arrangement. Auchinleck promised to look into it from my angle because I argued the question at some length, and eventually I received a copy of the Defence Department's directive defining the duties of the Military Attache and directing him to 'show' his despatches to the Ambassador. I considered even this unsatisfactory.

My final and most important talk was with the Prime Minister, who wrote to me on the 21st December 1946:

"My dear Asaf,

As I told you the other day, I am anxious to have a long talk with you about your work in Washington. Unfortunately we have both been very busy and I did not think it worthwhile seeing you for a few minutes. I hope that the

Constituent Assembly will be over by Monday evening. On Tuesday and Wednesday I should like to have some time with you.

"I have to discuss with you not only the wider aspects of policy which we should follow in America but also many relatively minor matters which are significant, such as the kind of show we should put up there. Inevitably we have to conform to certain practices and protocol. But I see no reason whatever for our copying the ways of others. In regard to larger policy, we have to be exceedingly careful in our dealings with the State Department. I have not liked at all some things they have done recently in the international sphere as well as in regard to India. Some advice they sent to me a short time back was entirely gratuitous. They sent some kind of similar advice to Egypt also which was resented there. The United States are a great Power and we want to be friendly with them for many reasons. Nevertheless I should like it to be made clear that we do not propose to be subservient to anybody and we do not welcome any kind of patronage. Our approach, while being exceedingly friendly may become tough if necessity arises, both in regard to political and economic matters. We hold plenty of good cards in our hands and there is no need whatever for us to appear as suppliants before any country.

"There is the question of staff in the Washington Embassy. You take over, of course, the present staff there except in so far as it may have changed here and there. Additional staff may have to be appointed. This matter is being looked into by our Department. Persons will have to be chosen for special jobs, such as Economic Adviser, etc. They will normally be people connected with our Department.

"An important consideration will be our relations with the British Embassy in Washington which will have to be friendly but somewhat distant, politically speaking, in order to avoid any appearance of our functioning as an outpost of that Embassy. We are devising a special cypher for us to deal directly with each other.

"I have informed the Viceroy that Maulana Azad will fill the vacancy caused by your retirement from the Cabinet. So far the question of portfolios has not been finally decided. I am waiting for Rajaji to come back to Delhi and for Wavell to return from London. I hope these matters will be settled in the course of next week and we can then settle also the date of your departure."

The next letter of the Prime Minister on the subject of the Washington assignment was written on 3rd February 1947, just four days before my departure. It runs as follows.

"You will be going away very soon and I have no doubt you are frightfully busy as I am also. Still I think we should meet to have a talk. Would it be convenient to you to come to the External Affairs Department office

tomorrow morning, 4th February, at about 12 noon? If any other time suits you better, we can perhaps fix it up.

"There is one matter which is rather worrying me. I have mentioned this to you already. As the Washington Embassy is our first venture of this kind, we have to step out rather cautiously so that we may not create precedents which may prove embarrassing to us later and which may lead to criticism in India or elsewhere. I appreciate what you have said about the importance of the various activities connected with the Embassy. Nevertheless I think we should not spread out too soon, and we should rather concentrate on essential work and the development of our basic policy. It is easy to add to this. On the other hand if we try to start off on a big scale it will be difficult to have the same efficiency in all branches of our work, and it may be even more difficult to lessen those activities even though they might not be considered wholly necessary. There is always the danger of too much bureaucracy developing in any office or Department.

"It is difficult enough for us to find really competent men for the important work in hand in India or abroad. To multiply offices might mean a lowering of quality of the work. That is undesirable.

"This has to be looked at also from the public expenditure point of view as we shall have to justify everything that we do before the Assembly and the public. We have not been brought up to function in terms of pomp and circumstance and anything which is not considered absolutely necessary will be liable to criticism. We do not want to, and we cannot even if we wanted to, compete with the rich countries in our establishments. We have to set different standards and that in itself will give a distinction to our Embassy provided it is done in the right way. A competition in pomp and display is the last thing we wish to enter into. The psychological aspect is an important one, for you know well how our country looks upon this kind of thing. But the financial aspect is equally important and the fact that what we do in America will necessarily be a precedent for other countries where we are going to open Diplomatic Missions.

"I think therefore that we should always aim at simplicity with of course proper standards and efficiency. Our staff should be gradually increased when the essential need for any person is felt. I hope you will give serious consideration to these matters."

On the 3rd of February 1947 I was invited to lunch by Lord Wavell. We discussed both the general situation in India and special matters concerning my mission to Washington, regarding which he said: "Of course you will discuss all this with the Prime Minister." Before saying goodbye he told me that I would find Washington in summer rather hot. I laughed and said that having been born and bred in Delhi, I might be expected to stand

heat. He retorted, with the calm of the seasoned soldier that he was, "Yes, but don't forget that Washington is like a saucer nearly 200 feet below the sea level, and the humidity of Washington is very high. Its heat can be very oppressive. I experienced it when I was there." Wavell also told me that I would find the Americans very susceptible to appeals to their generosity, and the profusion and waste of food would just shock me for we here were experiencing scarcity. We also talked a little about his anthology of British poetry, and his differences with his own son in the assessment of modern poets.

The last party which I attended before my departure from Delhi was given by George Merrell, the United States representative in Delhi. It was a dinner and a dance which lasted till 2 in the morning. I met many Americans there. It was a foretaste of American friendliness and large-hearted hospitality.

I must not omit a letter which I received on the day of my departure from Mrs. Naidu. It runs as follows;

20, Curzon Road  
New Delhi  
7th February 1947

"Asaf dear,

You are setting out on a high mission, the first of a long line of Ambassadors of the new India – to interpret her great culture, to uphold her honour, to create for her an equal place among free & progressive countries. You can realise how those who have loved you through fair and foul weather, who have appreciated the sensitive and delicate qualities of your mind and spirit, who have watched and shared your times of inner anguish borne with such courage and dignity, and witnessed your unwavering loyalties and silent unstinted sacrifice, feel today when you stand on the threshold of departure. I need not put into words my benedictions. Ours has been for 33 years an unbroken and understanding affection. I will only say—be true always to your loveliest dreams. Give nothing but your noblest and finest to the Mission you have undertaken. 'Go with God', as the Spanish say.

Your loving  
Akka.

It was ever so inspiring to know what expectations and feelings I was leaving behind. Mrs. Naidu was Akka to me, ever since 1913, as she was to all the younger members of the Chattopadhyay family. Akka or A'ka was and still is a respectful form of addressing the eldest brother or sister among those nurtured on the composite culture of the Mughals, it being an abbreviation of the Arabic word *akbar* or big.

Before leaving Delhi Asaf Ali issued a farewell message in the course of which he said: "I am leaving the country at a time when every moment is pregnant with events of vital importance. But the thought that I have been called upon to serve the interests of our people in one of the greatest of the freedom-loving countries of the world will sustain me during my absence abroad. In spite of the internal controversies over political issues, the abiding interests of the people as a whole are incontrovertible. The material and intellectual developments which await the creative effort of India's 400 millions are so great that every day wasted in controversies spells a serious loss. They deprive tomorrow of the economic and social rights to which the masses of our country are indisputably entitled. In the matter of economic potentialities no country in the world is in a better position today than India. Our material resources and manpower are high. We have only to put our hand to the plough and the harvest of prosperity is ours."

Leaving India was, in terms of personal life, a wrench for Asaf Ali. It was little more than a year since his wife had emerged from underground life in January 1946, following cancellation of the warrant for her arrest. Much of these twelve months she had spent away from him, in extensive travel to far parts of the country in an effort to gauge the mood of people and of the political workers in a post-war India that was heading for what seemed to her an inglorious compromise with the alien rulers. Also looming on the horizon was, in a throw-back to medieval wars of religion, the partition of the sub-continent by the severance of Muslim-majority areas from India.

Having emerged as a public person in her own right, there could be no return for Aruna Asaf Ali to pre-1942 domesticity. Indeed, as heroine of the 1942 struggle she had become a legend, so much so that instead of her being known as the wife of a member of the Congress Working Committee, Asaf Ali was beginning to be referred to as the husband of Aruna. A factor that distanced her emotionally from Asaf Ali, a liberal with no ideology beyond humanism, was her introduction to Left-wing political thought during the years of underground struggle. Most of her comrades-in-arms were either Congress Socialists or Communists. Entertaining the vision of an altogether restructured society free of exploitation not only by foreign colonialists but native landlords and capitalists, she felt estranged from the entire Indian establishment of 1946. The Congress had, following elections to the legislatures, reassumed power in several provinces under a British dispensation constitutionally no different from what the Congress had rebelled against in August 1942. Jawaharlal Nehru's political radicalism appeared to have collapsed. He who had, in the late 1920's and throughout the 1930's, rejected Dominion Status as India's goal and insisted on Complete Independence, became on 2nd September 1946 a member and vice-president of the Viceroy's Executive Council, now designated as the Interim Government. This was under a colonial constitution (the Govern-

ment of India Act of 1935), and when India was yet to attain Dominion Status. The compromise, if not capitulation, opted for by the Congress and looked upon with disdain by Aruna Asaf Ali, is illustrated by the quaintly worded letter of Asaf Ali's appointment which Jawaharlal Nehru signed "by His Majesty's command" (reproduced on the facing page).

However, Asaf Ali's position was tragic from his own point of view. It was sad enough that, even after his release in mid-1945 after 33 months of detention, during which he had been tormented by anxiety on account of his wife, he could not be reunited with her. She came out of her underground life only in January 1946, and thereafter undertook ceaseless travel. But there was at least a common home to which she would return from time to time. Now he was leaving the country, with Aruna refusing the role of an Ambassador's wife.

Aruna was unmoved by the advice of Gandhiji who said to her in a letter dated 18th December 1946:

"Chi. Aruna,

I should like you to accompany Asaf to America. You will be able to give him much help there, and it would also be a service to the country. I would also say that you will be able to do much independent work in America.

I think it is your duty to accompany Asaf.

Blessings from  
Bapu"

If Asaf Ali's choice as India's first ambassador to the West in 1946, when the issue of partition was still wide open, was influenced by the fact that he was a symbol of Congress secularism, the presence of Aruna by his side would undoubtedly have underscored the untenability of the Muslim League's two nation theory. But Aruna had vowed not to travel out of the country till after independence. She accompanied Asaf Ali only up to Karachi; his only companion there onwards was to be Karamat, his personal assistant. Asaf Ali writes:

After three-and-a-half years of her underground life and another year of restless wanderings which she had spent away from me, we were together again in Delhi. I was hoping to share her memories of that exciting period which she had not confided in me so far. Only recently she had begun to show signs of a slightly calmer mood, and I was waiting for the time when she would relax and let me share the workings of her troubled soul. And now I had to leave her behind in India. The thread of happy domestic life which was snapped by the gravest of national crises nearly five years ago could not be picked up again.

At Karachi airport we were received by Congress friends and prominent men including the Mayor of Karachi. As I was to take off before sunrise we had an early dinner and spent the night in one of the retiring rooms at the aerodrome. The sky was still caressing the paling stars when I said goodbye to my wife who stood surrounded by her underground colleagues.

George R.I.

**GEORGE THE SIXTH** by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India, &c, &c, &c.

To all and singular to whom these Presents shall come Greeting! WHEREAS it appears to us expedient to nominate some Person of approved Wisdom, Loyalty, Diligence and Circumspection to represent Us in the character of our Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United States of America with the especial object of representing the interests of India; Now know Ye that We, reposing especial trust and confidence in the discretion and faithfulness of Our Trusty and Well-beloved The Honourable Mr. Asaf Ali have nominated, constituted and appointed, as We do by these Presents nominate, constitute and appoint him the said Mr. Asaf Ali to be Our Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United States of America, for the purpose aforesaid, Giving and Granting to him in that character all power and Authority to do and perform all proper acts, matters and things which may be desirable or necessary for the promotion of relations of friendship, good understanding and harmonious intercourse between India and the United States of America and for the protection and furtherance of the interests confided to his care; by the diligent and discreet accomplishment of which acts, matters and things aforementioned he shall gain Our approval and show himself worthy of Our high confidence.

And We therefore request all those whom it may concern to receive and acknowledge Our said Trusty and Well-beloved The Honourable Mr. Asaf Ali as such Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary as aforesaid and freely to communicate with him upon all matters which may appertain to the objects of the high Mission whereto he is hereby appointed. GIVEN at Our Court of Saint James's the Twentieth day of January One Thousand Nine Hundred and Forty Seven in the Eleventh Year of Our Reign.

BY HIS MAJESTY'S COMMAND  
Jawaharlal Nehru

I boarded the plane with a heavy heart, not knowing what the future held in its womb for India and for individuals like me and my wife.

A flood of memories rushed upon my mind as the Indian shore receded. For the first time after 32 years of struggle in the wilderness, I was now flying westward a free man, and as my country's envoy. It was a very long span between my mission and the earliest ambassadorial missions from India to the West some 22 centuries ago. My mind dipped in the history of ancient times when India under the Mauryan dynasty was exchanging ambassadors with Macedonia, Bactria and Parthia in the west and with China and other eastern countries. The Americas were there on the earth's sphere, but not known to the eastern hemisphere.

The veil of semi-darkness was gradually lifted and the sea below rapidly changed its shades from misty to pearl grey, and then to light leaf-green when, as if by a sudden command of the Sun-God, Dawn spread its rosy wings behind us and the gentle surface of the sea caught its shimmer from the lengthening beams. It was truly a scene of divine magnificence. And we, in an aerial vehicle that was an infinitesimal speck in the limitless vastness around and below, were its observers. In his play 'Perse', Aeschylus has left an unforgettable description of sunrise over the Aegian Sea near Salamis, when the mighty fleet of Xerxes, emerging out of the grey twilight, surprised the confederates' fleet in the Straits. It came to my mind along with the description by Anis, an Urdu master, of another sunrise by way of a contrast, over the sandy desert of Kerbala which witnessed the mighty army of Shimir fall on the little camp of Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet. I also wondered whether it was some such experience which inspired the Pharaoh Akhenaton to visualise the Sun as the Creator-Ruler of this world, in whose rays he beheld countless fondling fingers of the Creator stroking and caressing the whole of his creation to life from day to day.

We outsped the chase by the Sun and gained about two hours before touching down at Basra. The next landing was at the Heliopolis Airport where I was met by a large number of Indian nationals. I stayed in Cairo for three days. I gave an account of my experiences and activities in the course of a personal letter of 11th February 1947 to Jawaharlal Nehru:

"None met us from the British Consulate at Basra, but the President, Secretary and some members of the Indian Club came to the aerodrome and made various representations. The clerical staff of Grey Mackenzie & Co. complained that their pay and allowances were inadequate and accommodation insufficient. They had made representations through the British Consulate without avail. Grey Mackenzie & Co. are shippers handling most of the export and import cargo. The total Indian population at Basra is about 250, drawn from various Provinces and belonging to different communities. They live on friendly terms with one another. Their



unanimous request was that a representative of the Indian Government should be posted at Basra to look after their interests. According to them there are about 10,000 Indian soldiers in Iraq. This is a cause of irritation to the Iraqis who say that since they are not unfriendly to India there is no reason why Indian soldiers should be stationed in their land. I told the deputation that the Indian Government has no intention of allowing Indian soldiers to serve abroad, and they would be withdrawn.

### **With West Asian Leaders at Cairo**

"I was met at Cairo by some members of the Indian community including Siddiqi, an energetic young man who is attached to the press section of the Arab League. He is also the Secretary of the Indian Union, Cairo. None from the British Embassy has met me during my stay in Cairo.

"I called on the Premier and Foreign Minister on the 9th and met Nahas Pasha, who paid a return visit the same evening along with Siraj Pasha, the millionaire magnate who supports the Wafd party. I also met Azzam Pasha, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, in the office of the Arab League and had a discussion with him on matters of common concern to the Arab League, the Middle East and India. Naturally, Pakistan and League politics figured in the discussion. I found no difficulty in disabussing the mind of Azzam Pasha (who is definitely the man of the moment in the Middle East today) of the misconceptions sedulously propagated on behalf of the Muslim League not merely in the minds of responsible office-bearers of the Arab League but also in the minds of Ministers of Egypt. Azzam and I talked together for an hour and a half. He on his part explained that it was entirely wrong to imagine that the Arab League was a creation of the British foreign policy. The Arab League, he said, was born of a genuine feeling among the Arab nations that if the Middle East and the Arabs are to survive the class war and totalitarianism of the U.S.S.R., the democracy-hypocrisy of the British, and dollar and power politics of the U.S.A. and the colonising imperialism of France, they must present a united front. The British began to support the League merely because they felt that the League would be a buffer against Russia. 'He also said: 'I like Jawaharlal very much because I find in him a man of modern outlook. He is a man after my own heart.' He was distressed, however, by the fact that no agreement has been reached in India between the Congress and the League. He felt that united India's freedom was a matter of fundamental importance to the whole of Asia. But propaganda had been carried on among the Arabs to suggest that the Hindus were a fanatical people who had suppressed millions of their own kith and kin and were now out to reduce a hundred million Mussalmans of India to the status of the depressed classes. This brought me to my turn and by the time

I had finished, he said words to this effect: 'I am convinced. But the popular feeling which has been roused in Arabian countries has to be taken into consideration. I will do my best to disabuse their minds of the wrong impressions which they are carrying today. But I would like you to meet a few other friends and talk to them. The picture you have drawn of an Inter-Asian League of independent peoples, if achieved, will stem the tide and foil the imperialistic designs of the Western exploiters.'

"The same day I had a fuller discussion with Nahas Pasha when he came to pay me a return visit. I gave him your message and love. Nahas Pasha warmly reciprocated it, and added: 'I knew Gawaharlal's father' (the Egyptians pronounce 'j' as hard 'g') and had great regard for him, and I have very great regard and affection for Gawaharlal himself.' He was in absolute agreement with me on all points and said that when Mr. Jinnah came he taught him 'a hard lesson'. But Nahas asked me one or two pointed questions which showed that even his mind was not entirely at ease in respect of Hindu-Muslim relationship in India. 'Are you quite sure that when India has produced its constitution as a free country, all the stabbings and quarrels and disturbances will come to an end?' And again, 'Why should the Hindus kill Mussalmans when Muslims slaughter cows? Why do you not make laws for the slaughter of animals including cows in officially appointed abattoirs?' I answered his questions, and he said, 'I am satisfied. May God bless you and your country.'

"The next morning I had an appointment with the Aga Khan at the Mohammad Ali Club and had a one-and-three-quarter hours' session with him. I let him talk for the first fifteen minutes. He sketched before me his picture of international politics, and earnestly hoped that India would consistently maintain the policy of supporting the cause of Arabia, Iran, Viet Nam, Indonesia and the peoples of South and East Africa and not allow Indian forces to be employed for the suppression of their struggle for freedom.

"After he had said all this I assured him that this policy was being pursued consistently and would continue to be maintained. I then dwelt at length on the internal political developments in our country and drew a picture of our projected economic developments, which obviously impressed him. He was distressed by the present phase of League politics and expressed his disapproval of it. In the end he asked: 'But what are you going to do about the Princes?' He had met Baroda, Jaipur and some others. Baroda, he said, was following his own course and was not in agreement with those who were sitting on the fence. I told him quite frankly that we were not going to fall foul of the Princes for the sheer fun of it, but in their own interest and in the interest of the country they had to put their house in order. I told him that their last resolution was most unhelpful, but both the Constituent Assembly and the Chamber of Princes had appointed a

negotiating body and we hoped that a reasonable solution would be found. "The Aga Khan entirely agreed with me that the U.K. had no sustaining vigour left to implement any surviving imperialistic aspirations. In my previous talk with Azzam I had described imperialism as a phantom hovering over a dead corpse which was needlessly frightening those who had seen imperialism alive and kicking. Azzam completely agreed with me. When I repeated what had passed between me and Azzam, the Aga Khan jumped up, old as he is, and laughingly exclaimed: 'How strange that the three of us should come to the same conclusion, but by different routes!' And then he narrated the story of Solomon, whose dead body was propped up dressed in imperial robes, supported by a staff. Looking at the lifelike mummy, none believed that Solomon was dead. But eventually white ants ate up the core of the wood and one day the worm-eaten staff gave way and Solomon's mummy lay flat on the ground.

"At the end of our interview I said that I had been trying to persuade Azzam and others to get the Egyptian Government to exchange ambassadors with India and I hoped that he would mention this to the King when he met him next and also to Nokrashy and the other ministers, with whom he appears to have a lot of influence. He undertook to advance the suggestion, and added, 'When you write to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru next, please tell him that my services for diplomatic work are entirely at his and the country's disposal but not for any permanent post. I am old and I am about to undergo an operation. They suspect a cancer. But should Mrs. Pandit once again lead a deputation to the U.N.O., I shall gladly serve under her and be her second, but under no one else.' I offered him our country's gratitude for this offer and undertook to convey his message.

"I then proceeded to Azzam's lunch where I met Nokrashy Pasha. Although Nokrashy had an appointment with the King he stayed on till the last minute. I explained the entire field of our politics including Jinnah and the League, the Inter Asian Conference, and the international situation. Nokrashy finally said: 'We are in broad agreement with you on all points and we, on our part, want to see a united and free India. But please advise us how we are to get over the prejudice which the Muslim League's propaganda has been creating among the Arabs. I would any day trust Nehru, and I know that there is no danger to the Indian Mussalmans, but you know how sometimes in politics one has to hold one's peace when popular sentiments threaten to reject the voice of reason.' I have put it in my language. I returned a suitable reply and we parted as cordial friends. But the question of exchanging ambassadors was not settled. He was prepared to have a Consul General straightaway.

"Azzam invited me again to dinner the same evening, because he wanted me to meet and talk to the Grand Mufti of Palestine whom I had known many years ago, when he first toured India to raise funds for buying back

valuable land from the Jews. The Grand Mufti holds a key position in the Arab League. At dinner I, Azzam and the Grand Mufti talked from practically half past eight to twelve and I was happy to note that my earlier discussions with Azzam had converted him into an intelligent advocate of our cause. Before I left them Azzam requested me to bear in mind the problems of Egypt and Sudan which they expect to be brought up at the U.N.O., and of Palestine, and asked me to support their view. This gave me another opening for bringing home to the Grand Mufti the validity and legitimacy of the Congress point of view regarding the League's insistence on partition or the compulsory grouping of Bengal and Assam. I may venture to claim that I succeeded in convincing the Grand Mufti that the reasons for our resistance to unreasonable schemes of partition were sound.

"While I have laid some sort of a foundation, the work will be dissipated if immediate steps are not taken to send a goodwill mission. I suggest that Syud and Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani accompanied by Maulvi Ilfizur Rahman or Maulana Ahmed Said, and one or two others including perhaps someone from the N.W.F.P.--either Jafar Shah or Mian Allah Nawaz--should proceed to Cairo without loss of time and contact the responsible office-bearers of the Arab League and others. And I suggest further that a weekly in Arabic should be sponsored which should be locally produced here, containing selected news from India intended to engage the interest of the Arabic-speaking people in the economic development of India for mutual benefit. I have persuaded some leading merchants to found a weekly in Arabic under the title of 'Ittihadul-Meshriqain' (Union of the Eastern Countries) with a capital of 2000 pounds, and I have promised to secure from you an inaugural message. You will get a cable or letter from them.

"Last of all I would like to inform you that looking at the newspapers in Egypt, both English and Arabic, I wonder whether India exists on this globe at all. There is a total blackout. I have felt completely cut off from India since the moment I left Karachi and therefore I am longing to rush on to London. I do most earnestly hope that I shall not be so starved of India's news in America, otherwise you may just as well accept my resignation in advance. I cannot live without India even in Paradise."

In the course of a reply on 24th February 1947 to Asaf Ali's letter from Cairo, Jawaharlal Nehru said: "What you have written about Egypt is very much before us. I wish we could send someone there as you suggest. I fear, however, that we must wait for further developments in India and in the Interim Government before we can take any such step. Any appointment at present involves all manner of approaches to various parties, including the Viceroy.

"I was interested to read of your interview with the Aga Khan. I am in entire agreement with him in what he told you."

## In War-Ravaged London

Asaf Ali's diary entries on his visit to London, on way to the U.S.A., bring out the grim condition of the post-war Britain:

We took off from Cairo aerodrome on the 11th February and after cruising for four hours returned owing to bad weather. Took off again after some time and after going more than half way had to return to Marseilles and spent the night there – bad weather again. Once again we are in the air. D.N. Pritt, K.C., happens to be a fellow traveller, full of his professional success. At the Marseilles aerodrome I picked up the *Picture Post* of 8th February with Jawaharlal's likeness--nosing a rose--on the front cover, and various scenes of the Constituent Assembly. Under the picture it says: 'I want to be friends with England.' Arranged to send a copy to Jawahar. I have persisted in wearing my usual garb. But both the cap and the pajama attract too much attention and raise smiles. However I mean to persist as long as it does not hamper my work. In any case on ceremonial occasions there shall be no other dress.

At last arrived in London on the 13th. Was met by Krishna Menon and three members of the High Commissioner's staff. Found England snow-bound, bleak, gloomy and in every way terribly affected by the years of war.

The morning after my arrival, at the Dorchester Hotel when my breakfast was brought in I looked for the two eggs I had ordered, and not finding them asked the waiter whether my Personal Assistant had omitted to mention it. He had not, the waiter explained; it was simply that eggs were acutely scarce.

In the course of a letter that he wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru from the Dorchester Hotel on 17th February 1947, Asaf Ali gave an account of his activities and observations in London:

"I arrived on the 13th, and found myself fixed up for two appointments the same evening. The first was the High Commissioner's reception at the India House, where I met prominent Indians, a large number of diplomats of various countries, the Secretary of State for India, some leading representatives of the Press and several members of Parliament. I had a brief talk with Lord Pethick-Lawrence about the formalities I was expected to observe. In the general welcome from the members of the British Parliament, the former tone of patronisation was totally absent. There were about 500 persons present. Among them were some retired British officials including Sir Archibald Rowlands who was the first to come up to greet me, and Sir Jeremy Raisman who, as usual, was full of geniality.

"At the next function, organised by Krishna Menon and the India League in Holborn Hall, there was a bigger gathering, mostly of Indian students resident in London. Krishna Menon said a few kind words of welcome and asked me to say 'how do you do' to those present. I made a short speech

in Hindustani describing the new spirit of the country and telling our nationals that they had every reason to feel proud of being Indian, equal in status and dignity to all the other free people in the world. I also gave them a picture of the vast economic projects which we are striving to develop in order to raise the standard of the people's life. I briefly reiterated the salient points in English for the benefit of the Press and the non-Indians present. Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai followed me and made a suitable speech, describing the new ambassadorial appointment as a historic step. He said that although his position had been difficult on account of dual allegiance, he hoped that he had laid a sound foundation in the U.S.A. on which it would be the new Ambassador's privilege to erect the superstructure of friendly relations between the two great countries. The function came to an end with the singing of the national anthem.

"After dinner the same evening I met representatives of Indian newspapers at their request and spoke to them 'off the record', giving them an outline of the political, administrative and economic developments in India. The representative of the *Dawn*, after putting a few questions, excused himself in the middle of my talk. I laid special emphasis on economic collaboration between India and other countries of the world including the U.K. which would be delayed if any political party was encouraged to come in the way of an early settlement of India's constitutional status as a free country. This approach has, I have noticed, been appreciated by all the Britishers with whom I have had occasion to talk. Sitting here in London and getting an idea of the various bottlenecks which are holding up the rehabilitation of the U.K. after the severe blow which they have suffered, it is as plain to me as daylight (which has been totally absent throughout my stay here) that the economic argument is the most potent and effective one.

"The next day I was advised by the Secretary of State to meet the Duke of Gloucester who was to receive me on behalf of His Majesty (a substitute for the historic ceremony of 'kissing hands'). The vicarious audience took place at St. James' Palace, Marlborough House. It was informal. Most of the half hour which I spent there by the fireside with him was occupied in discussing on a purely human level England's difficulties and economic condition, Australia's prosperity by contrast (he had recently returned from his Australian visit), and the situation in India, political and economic.

"My next interview was with the Secretary of State himself. On account of a drastic electricity cut I had the peculiar experience of walking through the dark corridor of the India Office by candle light. Lord Pethick-Lawrence sat in the chair previously occupied by Lord Morley and Montagu and many other illustrious predecessors. He received me half way from the door and we sat down by log fire and chatted for about half an hour, discussing the British fuel crisis and the Indian situation. He was

cognisant of the unhelpful attitude of the League. I repeated my 'economic collaboration' argument, and how the desired consummation was being delayed. He agreed. Talking of the responsibility and the historic character of my appointment, he said that the Americans were peculiarly sensitive to appeals to their generosity.

"The third function that day was a dinner at the India House under the auspices of the Indian Association and Institute. Covers were laid for 300 persons. Ernest Bevin, Lord and Lady Pethick-Lawrence, Rev. Sorensen and Lord Listowel were among those present. Lady Pethick-Lawrence, in spite of her age and advanced deafness, was good enough to turn up. She can hear with the help of an electrical gadget: it is a small microphone.

"Among the speakers before me on the occasion were Mr. Bevin and Lord Pethick-Lawrence. I felt while Mr. Bevin was speaking that he was allowing himself to say a great deal more than a Foreign Minister of the U.K. would normally have regarded safe. On the whole he spoke with earnestness and there was every evidence in his speech of a genuine desire ultimately to see India in full possession of the power to which she is entitled as a free country. But one or two points attracted my attention. I felt that I had to meet them. I found it impossible to let a sermon pass without the comment it called for. When my turn came I laid emphasis on the need for cessation of all talk of civil war. British friends were of opinion that Mr. Bevin's speech was unhappy and I as India's spokesman had owed it to my country to point out the indiscreet reference to civil war which was liable to be interpreted by interested parties as an encouragement."

A report of the proceedings at the India House dinner, including the speeches by Bevin and Asaf Ali, was sent out by an Indian Press representative. Following are some extracts:

"Mr. Bevin said, 'My task is concerned not so much with India but to keep the ring. I have to look after all the other parts of the world and give Lord Pethick-Lawrence a chance to settle India. Our great desire, however, is to see India start off as a going concern and not suffer any disruption in her civil life--not to engage in civil war of any kind. I can speak for the whole Cabinet when I say that our desire is to see India--Muslim, Hindu and the rest--joined together and taking over from us as a going concern. That would be a great tribute not only to the British Government but to the entire British Commonwealth. That is what we hope, that is what we pray for and that is what we are striving for. Too many countries have had to secure their liberty through strife. There is no war so hard, so troublesome--no war which takes so many generations to overcome--as civil war. It is far worse than any external war. I have seen it. I have seen brother against brother, father against mother. It is one of the most disastrous wars of all wars.

"Mr. Bevin's voice rose to a high pitch as, thumping the table, he roared:

'I have joined with my colleagues in every endeavour to ensure that this great subcontinent of India--this amazing mass of people--will show to the world that not only have their cries for liberty been heard but that they were able to exercise it when it came. Often in the Foreign Office I stand and look at the map of the world. I see the Indian Ocean and the great contour of the subcontinent of India and ask myself: Will India be a stabilising place for peace in the new world? I see the great Russian imperialism and financial imperialism of the United States and see ourselves in the middle, establishing liberty wherever we can. I say to myself: Will there be conflict? Will there be war? Will those great countries clash and bring us into war more terrible than we have ever known? Then I say: India is the key to the situation. If that key can be held in security and peace, then the peace of the world can be held for hundreds of years. Let you resolve, therefore, not to fight over your difficulties and start another world struggle, but unite and taking into your own hands the liberty for which you have struggled so long, make it a blessing to the world for generations to come.'

"Mr. Asaf Ali said: 'I did not really want to make a speech tonight. As a matter of fact, I must confess, I am not used to making after dinner speeches to select gatherings of this kind. Throughout these years it has been my privilege to address masses of men and women. However, I must say I am overwhelmed by the expressions of genuine sympathy tonight. As Mr. Bevin says, we occupy a key position in the world. Long before the last war broke out it was my privilege--and my disappointment--to urge the British Government's representatives in Delhi to realize and recognise this key position of India.'

"Referring to the time when Sir Stafford Cripps went out to India, Mr. Asaf Ali said: 'If an agreement which we had been struggling to reach on April 10, 1942 had been reached, India with her immense manpower and resources could have reduced at least by a couple of years the duration of the last war. (Cheers). However, all is well that ends well. Let us begin afresh and build up a happier world by coordinating human activity the world over. What after all is civilization? It is the result of kneading together human labour and skill and natural resources of the world. When we bring these together in harmony we create civilization. But all this requires co-ordination and co-operation throughout the world, and that is what India is striving for. I go to the United States with this message of peace and prosperity. India's hand of friendship is held out to everyone--to Great Britain, to Russia, to the United States, to everyone. Those who value India for what it is, those who recognize its key position, let them grasp our hand and be friends. Nobody is more fully aware of the disastrous effects of civil war than we are, and the less we talk about it the better for all concerned. We are also conscious of the international disaster which, twice within the past 25 years the West has presented to the world. The accumulated wealth of centuries has gone to the bottom of the sea or up in smoke leaving behind a shattered world. It is a wreck that cannot be repaired unless and until the world is treated not as a monopoly of one nation or one race



but as the home of all human beings living in peace and prosperity'.

The British Press, however, took little notice of the India House dinner. Asaf Ali writes:

The size of even the leading daily newspapers is reduced to four pages. I do not remember seeing any reports of Mr. Bevin's or Lord Pethick-Lawrences's speeches at the dinner, or mine. However, the *Evening News* had a few lines about me a day earlier: "Tall (I am just 5 feet and under 6 inches), handsome (flattering, to make me blush) and dignified, Mr. Asaf Ali is something relatively unusual in Indian politics..."

In a further letter to Jawaharlal Nehru on 18th February 1947, Asaf Ali gave an account of his conversation with Sir Stafford Cripps during a supper meeting:

"We covered a lot of ground during the 2 1/2 hours we were together. Lady Cripps was there all the time. First of all I must tell you that Cripps is once again in his former and genuine mood. He is sick of Jinnah's intransigence. Referring to Britain's economic crisis, Cripps said: 'You see what is happening here. We are in the midst of a crisis, and all our time is taken up by it. I have been in attendance at Cabinet meetings for a fortnight day after day, continuously. I wish Jawaharlal would appreciate that certain things cannot be done overnight, and nothing can be lost by exercising patience for a while.' He was speaking with reference to the persistent rumours and Press forecasts about the withdrawal or threat of withdrawal of the Congress from the Interim Government. He earnestly hoped that you and our other colleagues would show further patience for a while. I offered to pass it on to you. He said that he was not writing to you because the Viceroy did not like any direct contacts on matters of this nature; and he did not like my sending you a cypher message either, which was sure to leak out here, or from our Department. I therefore sent you a brief and open cable.

"The talk about withdrawal of the Congress from the Government, while embarrassing our friends, encourages the opponents to play with the idea of impending chaos and civil war. It affects men like Bevin, who talked as he did at the dinner two days ago with the phantom of civil strife looming large and real before his eyes. I have it from Bajpai that one of the reasons why we failed to secure a seat on the Security Council was largely due to the feeling in the State Department and, therefore, among their South American satellites, that the situation in our country was uncertain, and they were not sure to which Government they were allotting this seat. Viewing things and happenings at home from the angle of other Powers and peoples abroad, I feel that while the subtle details which make up our situation at home are beyond their comprehension, the general effect of the news of serious differences is unhappy.

"Here in England they are really in the grip of a vicious economic octopus.

Although the Labourites are confident at present, I am not quite sure that they will be able to brave the storm of discontent that is brewing, if they fail to allay it before long.

"The interest of the thinking section centres on two points: the Sterling balances, and the fate of the British public servants in India. There is no evidence of the ability of the British Government to repay the debt to India immediately or in the near future. They are not in a position to manufacture heavy machinery and capital goods for us, if we expect to set off the price against what they owe us. Of course, you will size up things with ampler information available to our experts, but at a superficial glance it appears to me that we should be as careful as a creditor generally is with a debtor who is about to walk into the Bankruptcy Court.

"By the way, there was a strong rumour here that Wavell had submitted his resignation. While Pethick-Lawrence shook his head during my interview with him, Cripps, when I put it to him, said: 'But he has been there for three years, and his term is up.' This means that a change is imminent. I wondered whether Cripps would care to go out, and he said, and also Lady Cripps, that he was required here. I, however, felt that Cripps would not be averse to the idea."

During Asaf Ali's stay in London he had numerous visitors including representatives of the press like Kingsley Martin, Towler of the *Daily Herald* and Richard Fry of the *Manchester Guardian*, through the good offices of Agatha Harrison who was constantly acting as a link.

Asaf Ali was invited by the Rev. Mr. Sorenson to meet a group of Members of Parliament who were specially interested in India. About this meeting Asaf Ali writes:

I spoke for an hour and a half, answering all their questions. Asked about the apprehension of civil strife, I put them a counter-question: 'Supposing your worst fears materialise and there is a civil war, what is going to be your role? Are you going to back those who work for partition after your own Cabinet has made it clear that such a demand whether for a major or a minor portion is wholly untenable, or will you take sides with the bulk of the population, which now means both the Congress-majority provinces and a very substantial number of the Princes of India? Will you just stay there and look ridiculous while the two sides are seeking a decision by the arbitrament of the sword? In any case you have to keep your economic condition in view. Surely you would want the friendship of the bulk of the population within whose region lie all the economic resources and industrial potential.' This proved a clincher.

After the receipt of these accounts from me, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote back and said, "I have of course read it with the greatest interest and shared it with others." Meanwhile the Prime Minister of England, Clement Attlee, had made in the House of Commons his historic statement on India.

Jawaharlal commented on this in his letter: "You must have seen the full text of the statement I issued two days ago on Attlee's declaration in the House of Commons. The Congress Working Committee is meeting on 5th March to consider this matter. But all of us here felt that we should not delay issuing some kind of a statement, and so in consultation with others I issued my statement. The reactions in India to Attlee's pronouncement are still rather mixed. I feel, however, that it is a striking departure from the normal British policy and something has been done which cannot be undone... The responsibility is going to be ours in future, and the time limit forces the pace of events and will depend on the directive that Mountbatten will bring with him. Meanwhile we are not pressing for the resignation of the Muslim League members of the Government. To do so now would close the door finally. Therefore we shall await Mountbatten's arrival and see how things shape themselves and then take such steps as may be necessary. Generally speaking our attitude is to make another effort to get the Muslim League into the Constituent Assembly. If this succeeds, well and good, and we proceed according to the Cabinet Mission's plan of May the 16th. If it fails, then that plan is superseded by Attlee's announcement and we go ahead with the Constituent Assembly... If in spite of our efforts the Muslim League continues to be non-cooperationist and direct actionist, then it cannot obviously continue in the Interim Government... The Princes seem to be sobering down and the recent British announcement has shaken them a little. Probably most of them will join the Constituent Assembly."

### **First View of a New World**

Asaf Ali describes in his diary notes the final, trans-Atlantic, lap of his journey to Washington:

Taking off from London on 19th February for New York, we first came down at Shannon. Republican Eire's flag was like our own Indian National Flag hoisted the wrong way round: the colours were the same but the three bands were flying vertically instead of horizontally. We were offered supper in Shannon and I don't remember having enjoyed a better meal since I left India. The masses of delicious butter and good bread and chicken were in strange contrast with what one found in London. The War has left the Republic of Eire in the peaceful enjoyment and quiet development of the island. Taking off again we took eight hours to cross the Atlantic by night, and Ganda (Newfoundland) being ice-bound we had to fly on to Moncton in Canada. Never in my life had I felt the cold so much as at Moncton.

The next lap was from Moncton to New York. When we landed at the La Guardia airport I experienced the hospitable ways both of the airline by

which I was travelling and of the States' representatives who received me. Ambassadors in the United States of America enjoy singularly high prestige. Although I was only an Ambassador Designate, the officer in command requested all the passengers to keep their seats until I had left the plane.

As I emerged from the plane half sleepy at 4.30 a.m. the flash lights of cameras held me in their beams. I discovered the ruling power of the cameramen of the States, whom President Truman calls the "One-more Club". When the ordeal was over I found myself in the midst of unfamiliar faces of the officers of our Embassy and some others who were there to receive me on behalf of the United States. The Minister, B.R. Sen had sent the First Secretary and some other members of the staff to New York to escort me to Washington. The introductions over, I was dragged into a small room with powerful lights switched on, and was made to stand in front of a microphone by the newsreel representative who wanted a message from me. I said something about coming from an ancient country loaded with cordial greetings and sincere good wishes of India for the leading republic of the New World: "My people have sent me with sanguine hopes that it will be granted me during my stay here to be instrumental in strengthening closer political, economic and cultural relations between the peoples of America and India on a sure and lasting foundation of freedom, equality and reciprocity."

At the hotel where I was taken for a short rest before proceeding by train to Washington, I had a fairly comprehensive talk with the First Secretary, M.O.A. Baig. He happened to be the son of Sir Abbas Ali Baig, a member of the Secretary of State's Council when I was a student in London some 35 years ago. I had landed in European garb but without a hat, and so the experienced First Secretary took me to one of the reputable hatters and selected a Homburg--which is almost the hallmark of the diplomatic corps. The ceaseless bustle of life below the skyscrapers of New York, congested traffic and well dressed windows burst upon me like an avalanche of new experience. What I had seen, in my younger days, of pre-war Europe seemed like a pale forerunner of the material achievements which met my eye in New York.

The train by which I travelled to Washington was greatly superior in comfort to the British trains, not to speak of the trains in India. I had a self-contained room with an attached bathrom, all to myself. Trains run at short intervals and they have their bars and common sitting rooms, and from some of them you can send wireless messages anywhere and even speak over the phone when the train comes to a stop. Throughout the journey from New York I found a cover of snow as far as the eye could reach, and I stepped out at Washington on a platform overlaid with a thick carpet of snow. Officers of our Embassy and, according to the diplomatic

convention, representatives of all the Commonwealth Embassies were there to welcome me.

The Indian Ambassador's house in Macomb Street is the envy of nearly all the Embassies in Washington. It is beautifully situated on what may be called a hill with more than 6 acres of ground all round a lovely little garden with a bed of roses added to it by Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, and plenty of rhododendrons, maple trees and also some silver and copper birch trees. Originally this house belonged to Walter Schoellkopf, a retired American diplomat. The white marble mantel of the reception hall, which is the proudest possession of the place, came from the Duke of Westminster's Devonshire house. Tastefully furnished, the residence has, apart from the entrance hall, the office of the Secretary and a small reception room, a big reception hall and a moderate-sized dining room. Then there are some six suites of rooms with separate baths, for the Ambassador's family and guests, and nine rooms for servants. Also a cinema hall on the attic, a swimming pool in the basement with two garages and a finely equipped kitchen and laundry. All the servants Sir Girja had left behind for my benefit--the butler, a parlour maid, a chamber maid, the cook, the valet, the cook's assistant, and a laundry maid--were waiting to receive the Ambassador in the entrance hall. Since the car could not go up the drive on account of the thick layer of snow on the pathway and the danger of skidding back, I had to wade through the snow from the gate up to the door of the house.

On entering it, several of my solitary confinements in prison came back to my mind. The contrast was bewildering. The pomp of the Ambassador's house with an army of servants rather weighed me down and I wondered whether I was not a misfit. Gandhiji had enjoined me to live simply, but here I was confronted with what was considered to be proper and normal in Washington for an Ambassador. Adjustment to this standard of life was not easy, as I discovered later on to my cost. There is an old Persian couplet containing sound advice from Sa'adi. Freely translated it means: "Either strike no friendship with those who ride elephants, or construct a house which may admit elephants into it." The question was that either India was to be in the international picture according to international standards, or keep out until the country could afford to.

### **An Ambassador's Chores**

I began to attend the Chancery from the third day. There I was more at home, because I had got used to a far bigger organisation of this sort as Minister of Transport. The house in which the Chancery is located was originally the residence of Dupont, the famous millionaire. Later on I added a big wing to it by acquiring a neighbouring house to accommodate

our expanding organisation.

On 24th February 1947, two days before presenting my credentials, I met General Marshall, the Secretary of State. It was a cordial and frank meeting. Marshall is a burly and straightforward soldier, and has no devious ways.

In the time of President Roosevelt the ceremony of presenting credentials used to be very elaborate, with a guard of honour and much fanfare to impress foreign diplomats with the great Republic's rising power. Ordinarily an ambassador presenting his credentials makes a speech and the President replies. But I was informed that this formality would be observed by exchanging written speeches at the informal presentation.

The ceremony was extremely simple. Woodward, Chief of Protocol, fetched me from the Embassy in a White House car and after meeting some of the Secretaries of the State Department I was ushered into the President's historic office. I was in my Indian diplomatic garb with the cap on, and it had been explained to the State Department that Indian etiquette demanded that respect should be shown by appearing with covered head. The President, an obviously human, cheerful and transparently sincere gentleman received me at the threshold and seated me next to him at the head of his Presidential desk. He opened the conversation with congratulations and the remark that it was a truly historic occasion and observed how greatly Americans admired Indian philosophy and age-old culture. The informality of the ceremony encouraged me to remark that it was a fact of history that there would have been no America if there had been no India. Columbus set out in search of India and having found America, believed that it was India. The President was obviously tickled by this reference. Then I talked about America's great role in the Western hemisphere and I ventured to suggest that now that America had conquered time and distance and had set the pace for the rest of the world in scientific research and achievement, she has a greater role to fill in building a peaceful and prosperous human society. The President was handsome in his acknowledgment of this compliment and we agreed that India has similar tasks to perform in the Eastern hemisphere and if the two of us could join hands we might succeed in maintaining peace throughout the world. Then I rose and presented my Credentials and the following Remarks:

"Mr. President, It is my unique privilege as the first Ambassador of the far-famed and ancient land of India and of her 400 million people to have the honour of presenting to you, Sir, as the Head of the Great Republic of the United States of America, the Letter of Credence to which His Majesty King George the Sixth of the United Kingdom, as advised by the Honourable Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Vice-President and Foreign Minister of the Interim Government of India, has set His hand and seal

and charged me with the honourable task of delivering it to Your Excellency in person.

"I may, on this historic occasion, crave your indulgence, Sir, to assure you and through you the great and powerful people of the United States that my countrymen have watched with deep and extremely friendly interest the inspiring spectacle of the free and freedom-loving people of the United States marching from peak to peak of prosperity, and ever higher achievements, which have made the progressive pattern of Western civilisation worthy of sincere admiration. We, in India, have inherited a past which goes back to the glorious ages of ancient Egypt and Babylon, Asur, Arabia and Iran, Greece and Rome, and we have been throughout the vistas of Time contemporaries and near neighbours of China. In our own independent right we had both diplomatic and trade relations with all of them in the past. But since the great renaissance of the modern Western world, this is the first time after centuries that India at the dawn of her renewed freedom has entered into direct diplomatic relationship at the highest level with a power and people of the Western hemisphere who occupy a unique place in history in every sense of the term. Permit me, Sir, to assure you that my Government and people very greatly appreciate your Government's decision to be the first in the world to exchange Ambassadors with India. We are peculiarly sensitive to friendship on equal and honourable terms, and loyalty to friends, once we know they are friends, is our national characteristic.

"The purpose and object of my mission in your great country is the steady implementation of this friendship in all spheres of life, political, economic and cultural, and I offer my country's wholehearted cooperation in both re-erecting the very seriously impaired fabric of human society, and in building up a happier and better world for all, through international fellowship and organised effort.

"You may rest assured, Mr. President, that in spite of the sedulously disseminated doubts about India's integral growth to her destined stature, there is not a shadow of uncertainty about the indomitable will of New India to make her full contribution to the restoration and maintenance of peace in the world. The history of your own country proves the futility of civil strife. The seasoned captains of India's appointed destiny may be trusted to steer the barque of the New State safely into the harbour of peace, prosperity and international cooperation."

The President replied in these terms:

"This is truly a historic occasion. It emphasises a grandiose development for which modern history affords no parallel, namely the emergence of 400 million people with a glorious past, of which you are so justifiably proud, to a state of complete control over their own destiny. The Government and the people of the U.S. have always followed the developments

relating to India with deep interest.

"A democratic and stable India has a great contribution to make to the peaceful progress of mankind so that the responsibility now resting with India's statesmen is not to their own people but to peace-loving people everywhere.

"You may be sure that officials of this Government will be ready at all times to cooperate with you in the accomplishment of your mission to this country. Officials of the Government have on various occasions made it clear, and I take this opportunity to re-state the fact, that we stand ready to assist India in its commendable plans for economic development in all appropriate ways which would prove a benefit to our two countries and to the world."

Writing to Jawaharlal Nehru about the ceremony of presenting credentials, Asaf Ali says:

"I may perhaps describe the President's office room. It is not as big as and imposing as some of the office rooms of the Ministers in New Delhi. In my opinion the Delhi Secretariat, though very imposing and comparing favourably with some of the biggest Chanceries of Europe and America, when viewed from the standpoint of the bulk of the people of the country who live, at the moment at least, in abject poverty, is wholly disproportionate. At one time I was not inclined to endorse Mahatma Gandhi's judgement on New Delhi. He called its extravagant architecture a sin. Now having seen the modest Numbers 10 and 11 Downing Street, and the White House, I am inclined to regard the Romanesque and highly ambitious Government House and Secretariat of New Delhi a little out of proportion to our insistence on simple living and high thinking. The President's office room was very modestly furnished and its biggest possession appeared to be some maps and a big globe for the President's contemplation of the world's geography. White House itself is a modest building, a mere pigmy as compared with our Government House and even our Prime Minister's House, and strangely enough it has no compound walls and is open to view from all sides to the passers by. When I wondered why it was so, I was told that the Americans want to keep the White House unprotected from the public gaze because they want to keep an eye on their President.

Mr. Woodward drove me back in the White House car to the Embassy and I invited him into my office where I offered him some tea. He remarked, "I have not had an Ambassador pouring out tea for me before." We chatted informally for about 15 minutes. When the discussion turned to some recent speeches made in the USA concerning Russia, Mr. Woodward gave an intimate picture of Molotov and his party when they first arrived, and described their incomprehensible behaviour as viewed by Americans. They were found suspicious of everything and even pounded the mattresses of the Guest House and scattered the coverlets, etc., presumably to



examine every little thing lest there should be some gadget hidden somewhere to betray them. No two persons were found to be talking among themselves in the Guest House. A third would always be present as a witness."

The atmosphere of social life in Washington in the late 1940's is captured in the following excerpts from a report by Marie McNair, in the *Washington Post*, of a reception for Asaf Ali:

"Asaf Ali can claim the distinction of being India's first Ambassador to the United States. But he can also say that he was welcomed to Washington at one of the largest, most elaborate parties of the year. The National Committee for India's Freedom held a reception in honor of the Ambassador, with well more than 600 guests crowding into the ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel.

"There was a long receiving line with ladies in bright embroidered saris to relieve the more somber dress of the men. The Ambassador, who is small and slim, wore the achkan costume--a knee-length black fitted tunic with white puttees. Dr. Anup Singh, Secretary of the Committee for India's Freedom who was host, wore an American business suit. Others in line to greet the guests were Mrs. Hansa Mehta, Indian delegate to the Human Rights Social and Economic Council of United Nations, who wore a dull blue sari; Nasli Heeramaneck, treasurer of the national committee; Sher Quraishi, secretary of the All India Brotherhood Association of Detroit; and from the National Committee, Mumtaz Kitchlew, Chicago representative. The lady in the sari of pale ivory and gold was Mrs. Hamid Ali, Indian delegate to the United Nations on the status of Indian women, and with her was her husband in robes of the same shade bordered in gray embroidery and wearing a tall black headdress.

"There was a buffet table as long as from here to there; a fountain of fruit punch and a bar. And tables and chairs rimmed the room and were set in the boxes, an inducement for conversational groups to linger. I saw Mrs. John Allan Dougherty pouring tea and opposite her, Mme. M.O.A. Baig, lovely in a glittering yellow sari, banded in gold.

"And who was there? Well, if there was a Britisher in the crowd, I missed him. But there were shoals of Senators and their wives, members of the diplomatic corps and others from resident society. There were also innumerable Indians to add a dash to the scene with their gay turbans and graceful saris. There were members of educational organisations, church groups and representatives from the many Indian organisations throughout the country.

"I glimpsed Mrs. Dean Acheson, wife of the Under Secretary of State, and Senator and Mrs. Pat McCarran moving through the throng. Also Mrs. Wallace White, wife of the Senate majority leader, wrapped in mink and wearing a white feather turban, and then Gen. and Mrs. Omar Bradley."

Asaf Ali comments on this:

It will be noticed that the main interest of the reporting does not lie in the guest of the evening or the country he represents, but in the description of

the leading personalities and particularly of the sartorial preferences of the ladies and their jewellery and the flowers (usually costly orchids) which they wear. I believe it encourages the custom of the dress makers, the jewellers, the beauty specialists and all those who provide the fashionable figures with a striking ensemble. Costly as flowers are in Washington, at every reception they figure in masses all over the place. Then came the turn of my inaugural reception (this is usual on the establishment of a new Embassy and even on the appointment of a new Ambassador.) The Embassy was done up for the occasion. This process included an ingenious device which Mrs. Baig, the First Secretary's wife, had hit upon. I had taken with me loads of embroidered garlands which had been presented to me in Delhi at farewell functions, as well as caskets which included an ivory model of the Taj. She made a remarkable pattern of the garlands against a large piece of black velvet. It was hung prominently on the wall of the ante reception room facing the entrance hall, with lights playing on it. We called it the Star of India. It became a star attraction for visitors, many of whom would collect in front of it to be photographed. Another draw was the ivory Taj, lighted up against the background of the Kashmir shawls I had brought with me. An added attraction was provided at the inaugural reception by the fine pieces of Indian statuary and of Moghul and Rajput paintings which were kindly lent me by the Heeramaneks of New York.

I had to stand and keep a perpetual smile on my face to greet the hundreds of guests and allow my hand to be shaken until I thought it would drop out of the shoulder socket. And the process had to be repeated when they started going back after some three cheerful hours. The Press said that India's Embassy had started off with great éclat.

There was, however, a curious incident on the eve of the reception. Some ladies of the Embassy and one or two other Indian ladies, led by the wife of the Minister who had arrived just a fortnight earlier, very kindly called on me in a bunch and offered me their assistance. I appreciated this willingness to help, but by that time the First Secretary's wife who had devoted a couple of months to the preparations had practically finished everything. I therefore told them that I would be grateful if they would greet the guests with their charming smiles and engage them in conversation. I was unaware at the time of the fact that Mrs. Baig, who had acted as the official hostess prior to the arrival of the Minister's wife, was the object of endless jealousy.

The Prime Minister's sister Mrs. Krishna Hutheesing and her husband were staying with me at the time. A question that faced me was whether I should receive the guests by myself because my wife was not there, or seek the help of one of the Embassy ladies as hostess, or perhaps request the sister of the Prime Minister--which would perhaps be just the right

thing.

A file was put up to me on the eve of the reception which revealed that in order to settle the question, my Minister had very kindly referred the matter to the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and asked for his advice. The Dean said that according to the usual diplomatic practice only the senior-most lady was entitled to such a position in the absence of the Ambassador's wife. I then put down on the file that the Ambassador would receive the guests by himself, which I did. Unfortunately, there were unpleasant repercussions. All kinds of distorted accounts were sent home non-officially, as I came to know later on.

In a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru on 8th March 1947, Asaf Ali gave a round-up of his activities and observations. Following are some excerpts:

"For the first two or three days I had to take stock of my environment and felt a bit baffled by domestic problems. Fortunately, almost immediately after I had sent you the S.O.S.,<sup>3</sup> I was completely relieved by the kind offer from Mrs. Baig, wife of the First Secretary, who is a lady of indefatigable energy and high social accomplishments, to take charge of the domestic and social side. She and Karamat have by now mastered the situation and I am very well looked after.

"The demands on my time are increasing very rapidly. Indians want me all over the place, from Montreal to British Guiana, and Latin and Central America, not to mention the various centres of USA where our nationals are residing. In addition to this I have to go through the gamut of protocols (62 Embassies in Washington in addition to members of the Cabinet, the Chief Justice and many other influential persons). I am trying to do as much as I possibly can.

"By now I have fairly taken stock of the organisation but for the Education Department which I shall visit on the 10th. I have looked into every nook and corner and called for comprehensive notes on the present and future activities of the Embassy as viewed by the different Heads of Departments. As soon as I have examined and analysed the situation, I shall send you a preliminary report. While talking of the organisation I may mention that even for the existing personnel the accommodation in the Chancery is totally inadequate and we are paying about 4500 dollars a month in rent for the Information Service and the Education and Supply Mission which are housed in other premises. If we capitalize the rent on the basis of 12 years we can purchase a suitable building and save in the long run.

"I fear the lengthy telegrams from the Food and Commerce Departments at Home demand equally lengthy replies. I have given strict orders that all outgoing telegrams must be carefully scrutinised and there should be a drastic economy of words. It becomes difficult to restrain members of Delegations flinging at us long telegrams some of which, in my judgment, could easily go by Air Mail. Last year we incurred as much as thirty

thousand dollars over outgoing telegrams. I feel that this expenditure can be cut down by 50 per cent."

Asaf Ali describes the organisational set-up which he inherited and his effort to shape it to meet the needs of India's emergence as an independent country:

The Embassy of India in the U.S.A. originated with an Agency General on 14th October 1941. Its establishment was dictated by the war-time necessity of having an agency of the Government of India in the United States to undertake functions similar to those performed by the High Commissioner for India in London, specially in regard to the procurement of war supplies from the United States. It was also a gesture by the British Government signifying a stage in the political evolution of India towards Dominion Status. A corresponding appointment by the United States Government with the title of Personal Representative of the President was simultaneously made, and at the time I went to Washington George Merrell held this assignment in Delhi. Behind these appointments really lay the insistence of President Roosevelt that India as an active partner in the war effort should be allowed to enjoy the status at least of a Dominion. Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, who had earned a high reputation among Secretaries of the Indian Government under the British, although he had had nothing to do with the Foreign Office or diplomatic work before, was selected to fill the post of the Agent General. He built up an organisation under the protecting wing of the British Embassy in Washington. The functions of the Agent General of India in the United States were to "coordinate India's part in all matters affecting the common interests of both countries and to represent India in public and on the platform and at social functions and of explaining India's social and economic development and her position in the community of the British Commonwealth of Nations."

The administrative staff initially consisted of two Secretaries to the Agent-General and an Information Officer. Growth in the activities of the organisation was fairly rapid and at the end of 1946 the administrative machinery had been expanded to consist of eight officials in the Chancery, three each in the Information and Education Divisions, and seven in the Supply Division.

In India, there is an impression that our foreign missions are more expensive than they need be. Some comparisons may be instructive. The British Embassy in Washington has personnel totalling about 2000, with 5 Ministers, 10 Counsellors, 7 Attaches, 15 First Secretaries and a host of other officers, apart from a vast Information Bureau in New York. Even a small country like Switzerland had in its Legation--not Embassy--nearly two-and-a-half times the number of the officers of my Chancery.

The amount of work which our tiny Information Division was doing was,

I can attest, out of all proportion to the staff strength: issuing handouts and press releases, almost every day, either at the instance of the Home Government or at my instance; answering queries and supplying information; and paving the way for the Ambassador's congressional, institutional and other contacts. And on top of this I had to comply with the requests of delegations to Lake Success to spare one of my information officers to help them. The general complaint about poor publicity abroad, in my opinion, does not seem to proceed from a clear realisation of the task. After all, the free press of a powerful country, in fact the most powerful country in the western hemisphere, could not be at our beck and call.

The first point for my consideration was to determine to what extent it was possible to Indianise the entire organisation. Prolonged consultations between me, the Minister and the First Secretary drove me to the conclusion that Indianisation of the clerical staff was beyond our financial means and could not be undertaken. All appointments of the clerical staff were temporary. According to a convention only Commonwealth residents were eligible for employment and the Canadian girls were found to be the cheapest, beginning with a salary of about 130 dollars a month and their services could be dispensed with after a week's notice. The standard of efficiency too was perfectly satisfactory. To import permanent clerks from India, with their privileges of leave, etc. would have entailed a very heavy expenditure in transport. With the greatest reluctance I had to be content with the structure of the organisation as I found it. I was, however, worried about the Cypher Section. But I could not, in spite of repeated demand, get anybody from India. Indian cypher assistants at home were not plentiful. This section was the last under the previous regime to be entrusted to Indians.

Among my first acts was an inspection of the entire organisation from the top floor to the basement in my own Chancery, and in other Divisions. I was told that this was the first time that the Head of the Mission had gone down to the basement and had taken an interest in the the system of docketing and registration.

My own duties covered a long list apart from the office work. For months I had to go round calling on the Heads of different Missions, to complete my protocols. Then there were the return calls and you had to be in your Chancery or in the Embassy to receive them. With more than 60 Missions in Washington, there were frequent invitations to National Day and other receptions and cocktails and you could not miss them without causing political speculation and misunderstanding. Then you had your visitors and interviewers. You had to keep yourself abreast of political events through Press and Congressional contacts, cultivate good relations with representatives of banks and business houses and, finally, you had to deal with routine work and attend to the pink telegrams (the receipts from

India) marked Top Secret, Secret, Confidential, and all varieties, and keep a vigilant eye on the green telegrams, which were the issues.

In the pink telegrams from Home, when I first came across the expression 'repeat not', after 'not', I wondered why it was necessary. Later on I happened to come upon Sir Hugh Knatchbull Hugessen's *Diplomat in Peace and War*. Describing his period of training, he says: "Mistakes did of course occur from time to time. I was involved in one once in connection with a telegram from Cairo. An Egyptian Prime Minister had been murdered. Telegrams were passing, reporting the tragedy and giving particulars of the probable successor. I was taking a message down on a typewriter to the dictation of a companion who was decyphering it. 'He is not very favourable to the British occupation', ran the telegram. My companion had a pipe in his mouth. Either the pipe or the noise of the typewriter obscured the word 'not'. The omission put the probable new Prime Minister in a very different light. He was appointed. How far he owed his position to the pipe and the typewriter I do not know, but some days later when Sir Eldon Gorst, the British Representative in Cairo, found out what had happened he was greatly disturbed." It then flashed upon my mind that probably before this incident the expression 'repeat not' had not become the staple of negative statements.

There used to be a fortnightly assemblage of Commonwealth Ambassadors at the British Embassy, and I had arrived as the representative of a potential Republic. I had every desire to cultivate the friendliest of relations with all Commonwealth Ambassadors but the rendezvous at the British Embassy posed a problem. If it was a meeting of independent members of the Commonwealth, why should it not be held in rotation at different Embassies? The very first fortnightly meeting fell within about a week of my arrival. I consulted my Chancery officers and my Minister and we eventually decided that the best course would be not to let it appear that we were cutting ourselves out of this arrangement altogether. At least the first and possibly also the second meeting might be attended by my Minister and a report of the proceedings sent to me to judge what advantage India could derive from these contacts.

Meanwhile I called on the British Ambassador, Lord Inverchapel in the normal course. He is a tall and well built Scot and a career diplomat with a lifetime of diplomatic experience. After about half an hour's chat, as we emerged on to the landing of the magnificent horse-shoe staircase on either side of which hung life size portraits of King George V and King George III, on the right and the left of anyone wanting to come down, Lord Inverchapel turned to me and asked, "Which way would you like to go down?" He quickly added an anecdote. When a highly placed American was coming out, he was asked the same question on the landing. The American looked at the portraits and turning to that of King George III,

said: "That's the way we went out and I'll go out the same way." Both of us laughed, and I said: "Well, then I may follow suit." It was a humorous remark, but also carried a presage of coming events. I pressed the British Ambassador not to come down with me, but he insisted on accompanying me to the steps of the entrance and saw me off well tucked away in my car to face the cold breeze and the snow outside.

The meeting cleared my way for the next Commonwealth Ambassadors' meeting. Lord Inverchapel asked me to sit on his left while Ambassador Wrong of Canada, who was very much senior to me, sat on his right. The Ambassador of Australia, the Minister of New Zealand and the Minister of South Africa sat in order to my left. This was a very agreeable gesture, since there was no reason why in the order of seniority India shouldn't have gone lower down as the youngest Dominion.

I found these meetings very useful. We used to consider not only political and economic trends in the Commonwealth countries but also a series of minor and major crises in Europe and elsewhere arising mostly out of the rising tempo of the 'cold war' between the mighty post-war giants. Our feelings were mixed, and among them was deep anxiety over what appeared a growing emotional sensitivity in American public opinion, which the opposite school of thought was fond of labelling 'war psychosis'. The language at international conferences was daily becoming more and more unrestrained. This was a matter of great concern to diplomats with old-world training. Expressions were being used in relation to whole nations which even at a municipal meeting would be ruled out as unparliamentary. The situation was deteriorating from week to week, and the faces of those who had borne the worst consequences of the last war, particularly in Europe, were getting longer and longer. On one occasion the wife of an Ambassador whose country has been overrun both by friends and enemies in their alternate chase of one another in Europe, on hearing a remark about the possibility of another war, held up her hands in horror and said in a tremulous voice, "Excellency, don't talk of another war. We have had more than enough of it."

### **Reparations: India's War Effort**

Another occasion for regular meetings with some other diplomats was the weekly session of the Far Eastern Commission comprising eleven nations. Ironically enough the Commission, presided over by Major General McCoy of the U.S., used to carry on its discussions over the fate of Japan in the former Japanese Embassy. We used to debate many problems on the agenda, but the general feeling among all except the president was that General MacArthur, otherwise known as SCAP (Supreme Commander, Asia and Pacific) was more or less a dictator and hardly any policy

decision which the Far Eastern Commission took, which was pretty rare, was ever translated into action by him. The Russian representatives were the most obdurate in resisting what they felt was Mac's caprice and whimsicality.

The only matter that came up which touched my country's interest was India's share of reparations; for the rest of the time India had the advantage of a perfectly disinterested participant in the debates. I had instructions from my country that although I might claim 12 1/2 per cent, there would be no objection to scaling down India's demand to secure a proper adjustment of other claims. I said in the course of my submission on this question:

"I desire to express my Government's appreciation of the spirit which had actuated the U.S. Government to present the Paper FEC-278 for solving the complex question of reparations. It contains the following: 'The shares of particular countries in the total sum of the reparations from Japan shall be determined on a broad political basis, taking into due account the scope of material and human destruction and damage suffered by each claimant country as a result of the preparation and execution of Japanese aggression, and taking also into due account each country's contribution to the cause of defeat of Japan, including the extent and duration of its resistance to Japanese aggression.'

"However, my Government's attitude is that the question of reparations should not follow *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation whereby punishment resembles the offence in kind and degree) but should be considered in accordance with the actual damage suffered. India is entitled to a fair share of reparations because she has sustained considerable damage and loss of material assets and human lives. My Government thinks that a country's war effort should be judged not so much with reference to the budgetary cost as to the totality of goods and services mobilised by her for the common war effort. In assessing a country's contribution one should not lose sight of the fact that the burden presses far more severely on countries with depressed standard of living--as in the case of my own country--than on countries more fortunately placed. I need not remind you of the colossal toll of lives during the Bengal famine which was one of the most heart-rending results of World War II in India.

"My Government has carefully considered the percentage allotted to India in the U.S. plan, namely 4%, and regards it too low to be acceptable. Judging by the assessment of India's share by all the others, it should have been higher. However, in order to help bring the plan within easier range of general agreement, my country would be prepared to accept any fair allocation. If my country can contribute to an agreement being reached by reducing her own claim of 12.5%, she would not be found wanting."

Enlistment in the armed forces had been voluntary, but the contribution in



kind was in the nature of a forced exaction by the British rulers. The diversion of food supplies to feed the forces outside India was a factor which contributed to the disastrous famine, followed by epidemics, in Bengal during 1943-44 in which more than three million men, women and children perished. The 'sterling balances' (not freely convertible into dollars or other international currency) which accumulated to India's credit during the war years were a measure of the diversion of supplies from the domestic market to meet the needs of Britain's war.

In asking for a fair share of reparations for India, Asaf Ali found useful a tally of India's contribution in men and materials to the war effort during 1939-45. It had been compiled by Col. Sher Ali Khan, the Military Attache, in February 1946.

Following are some highlights of the data on India's war effort.

By 7th December 1941 (when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour), India had shipped westward a quarter of a million troops: more than Great Britain or any other country in the Commonwealth had contributed at this stage.

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the Indian Army was enlarged to fight in the East too. India raised, trained, and equipped an army of, in all, 2,500,000 men by 1945 (from 189,000 in 1939). Commissioned officer strength went up from 1,115 to 15,740. The Indian navy was expanded from a strength of 2,300 men to 30,000; and the Air Force from 1,600 to 30,000.

The Indian Army took part in the campaigns in Malaya, Burma, East Africa, North Africa, Tunisia, Middle East, Sicily, Italy, and Greece. It suffered the following casualties up to August 1945:

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Killed           | 24,338  |
| Wounded          | 64,354  |
| Missing          | 11,754  |
| Prisoners-of-war | 79,489  |
| Total:           | 179,935 |

Over 500,000 Indian Army troops were being specially trained for jungle fighting when Japan capitulated. In addition, 7,00,000 Indian Army troops were serving in South East Asia Command, 220,000 in the Middle East and Italy, and 300,000 in India Command.

The Royal Indian Navy helped during the evacuation of Burma in 1942 and in the early days of the return through Arakan. As the tempo of the advance increased, it remained, to a large extent, responsible for the naval side of the Arakan and other coastal operations on the Burma front. Throughout the war, it was responsible for the local naval defence of the Indian ports and largely for the policing of the Persian Gulf.

At the beginning of 1942, the Royal Indian Air Force contained only two squadrons. Both had a strong R.A.F. element in them. By the end of war, there were ten squadrons, and the R.A.F. element had been greatly reduced. Some of

these squadrons operated in Burma, and others took over responsibility for the protection of the North-West frontier of India from the air.

In the early part of the North African campaign, India was solely responsible for the supply of the pipe-lines, rolling-stock, and locomotives employed. Some 1,200 miles of India's railway track, which she could ill spare, were torn up and sent overseas. Even her village industries were mobilised to supply blankets, camouflage nets, and pith helmets.

In order to make India an assault base, it became necessary to maintain in the country forces not only from the Commonwealth but from China and the U.S.A. For this purpose: accommodation was constructed for 1,320,000 men; and 42,000,000 square feet of covered storage was built.

Over 200 fully-equipped operational airfields were constructed. In addition, seven huge bases, each with runways over a mile long, were constructed by Indians at the expense of the Government of India, for the American Air Forces flying supplies to China.

The capacity of the 800-mile Bengal-Assam railway was quadrupled. Indian railways carried 1,162,000 long tons of military stores and 550,000 military passengers a month. Thirty special trains a day were required to keep the ports clear. One of these trains regularly made the 2,760-mile run from Karachi right across India to Ledo in Assam.

The capacity of India's ports was expanded many times. Before the war, India's few shipyards built small craft and were capable of minor repairs only. During the war, many hundreds of vessels were built; they ranged from minesweepers to barges and specially improvised craft to meet the transport and supply needs of the Army fighting in Burma, a terrain riddled with waterways of widely varying width, depth, and speed. 6,500 ships, of a total tonnage of 38,840,000 were repaired in 56 yards.

Many hundreds of miles of all-weather roads were built, largely by military labour. Two roads, constructed through almost unsurveyed jungle and mountain territory, were each over 300 miles in length. They formed a network between railheads and forward distributing points such as Ledo. They connected with the road systems of Burma, and hastened the opening of the overland route to China.

To assist the Russians in maintaining their stand against the German invasion, a 3,000-mile supply road was built from North-West India through Iran-Zahidan to Meshed--into Russia. One and a half million tons of stores were poured along this highway into Russia, at a time when it is doubtful if sufficient shipping could have been found to carry such a large quantity. A 24-hour continuous military convoy service was maintained on the road, which ran through country varying from burning desert to icy mountain passes.

Many hundreds of miles of fuel pipe-line--the two main arteries were each a thousand miles long--were laid from Bengal and Arakan to Assam and North Burma.

130 new hospitals were built. India greatly increased the manufacture of medical stores.

The development of industrial resources became of vital importance. India's steelworks, from their own resources, produced (at a rate up to 1,500,000 tons a year) the material for: Railway track; Bridges; Armour-piercing steel; Bullet proof steel; Machine tools; Floating docks; Ships; and Cranes.

85,000 workers were employed in newly-built ordnance factories which manufactured Machine guns; Depth charges; Grenades; Field guns; Bombs; Mines; Shells; and small arms ammunition. Other industries were mobilised to produce the metals for the guns and projectiles, the explosives to fill them, paints and lacquers to finish them, and containers to transport them. A total of 1,500 engineering workshops were adapted to link with the ordnance factories.

Aircraft were assembled and maintained at 18 centres in India. These centres also turned out spare parts and aircraft accessories. India's factories produced 4,500,000 parachutes of all kinds for the Allies. All the supplies dropped over Burma, which totalled 609,717 tons in a single year, were carried by Indian-made parachutes. India's clothing factories produced 400 million tailored items during the war. Every jungle-green uniform used in Burma was made in India. Indian leather was made into 50,000,000 pairs of boots by Indian workers.

The production of Indian timber was increased from 242,000 tons in 1940-1 to 1,274,000 tons in 1943-4. Over 60,000,000 square feet of plywood were produced by Indian factories.

India was the third largest consignor of supplies to Australia for the Pacific war. Russia and China also received much war material from India. So did the Middle East and Africa.

The United States received the bulk of its mica supply from India and Brazil, and by far the largest proportion from India. One-half of India's burlap was exported to the U.S.A. and sewn into bags, which were used for the transport of food. These bags were indispensable to the feeding of American troops and civilians.

Almost a quarter of American metallurgical manganese, a mineral essential for the production of both carbon and alloy steel, was imported from the Central Provinces of India. A large portion of American carbon and alloy steel went into making such military equipment as aircraft, ammunition and tanks.

Ilmenite was another important ferrous material for which America depended to a large extent on India. About 20 per cent of America's ilmenite came from India and was made into titanium pigments which are necessary for painting warships and other battle equipment.

Beryl, which is used in the production of beryllium copper alloys for aircraft manufacture and other war industries, was shipped to the United States from India. So were various animal skins used in making wind and rain-proof garments; coir, used in making fenders for ships; talc, which serves as an

insulator in radio and radar equipment; lac, from which shellac is made; and tea.

Besides exporting natural rubber to the United States, India cooperated by importing from America some synthetic rubber and components for use in products where natural rubber would otherwise have been utilised. As a result India was able to export more natural rubber to the U.S.A.

The cumulative amount of reverse Land-Lease to United States forces in India was worth 411,976,000 dollars on January 1, 1945, and 516,720,000 dollars on May 31, 1945.

### **Palestine at the U.N.**

A special session of the United Nations General Assembly was held at Britain's request, from 28th April to 15th May 1947, for constituting and instructing a special committee for consideration of the Palestine question at the next regular session in September 1947. (By a coincidence, the Jews in Palestine were to proclaim the formation of the State of Israel on 15th May 1948, the date on which Britain terminated its Palestine mandate--exactly a year after the special session of the U.N. ended on 15th May 1947.)

Asaf Ali was India's sole representative at this special session. The General Committee met on the 29th and 30th April to consider the provisional agenda. At the start of the proceedings Asaf Ali drew attention to a press report of a debate in the House of Lords in which Lord Hall was said to have declared that the British Government could not bind itself to accept any recommendation that the General Assembly might make on the question of Palestine. Asaf Ali asked the the United Kingdom representative for an elucidation of this statement. After some discussion as to the relevance of this request, in which the Egyptian and Soviet representatives supported India, the United Kingdom representative explained the position of his Government in the following words: "He (Lord Hall) did not say that my Government would not accept any recommendation of the Assembly. He said that he could not imagine it carrying out a policy which it thought was wrong. There is a distinction there."

The British-owned *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore wrote: "What a news agency describes as Mr. Asaf Ali's challenge to Britain--on the point whether Britain would accept the General Assembly's recommendations regarding Palestine--was mistimed even if it was not deliberately unhelpful." Jawaharlal Nehru, too, was not happy. He says in a telegram of 1st May 1947, after referring to a Reuters report dated 29th April: "Asaf Ali had, report said, referred to press report of House of Lords debate in which it had been stated that 'the U.K. was not prepared to say at this stage that it would accept any recommendations of the U.N.' Message describes you as pausing and turning to British representative, and asking: 'Is it true? If so, what is the use of considering any item on the agenda now?' I do not have full report of what you

said but I would suggest your avoiding raising issues which might affect relations between India and any other country. As we have informed you in our brief, we support Arab case generally. Nevertheless we should avoid as far as possible needless controversy." The *Hindu* commented on 5th May that Asaf Ali would "by no means have an easy time of it there. The part he is called upon to play in international gatherings in America is always a difficult one and as in the case of the Palestine issue it may, not seldom, be a very delicate part."

There were lively reactions also to Asaf Ali's proposal in the steering committee that both the Arab and the Jewish sides in Palestine should be given a hearing.

The *Bombay Chronicle* said on 2nd May 1947 that news agencies, whether innocently or by design, had emphasised one part of Asaf Ali's speech, thus conveying a wrong impression as if he had tended to incline towards the Jews. Characterizing this as "altogether wrong and unjust", the newspaper quoted from Asaf Ali's speech to show that he had urged the presence not only of representatives of the Jewish Agency of Palestine but also and in the first instance of those of the Arab Higher Committee of Palestine. The *National Herald* welcomed India's proposal to give all elements in Palestine a chance to be heard by the proposed Committee of Enquiry, and added that the enquiry should be impartial and free from the pull of Jewish money and the fear of Arab insurgency. In contrast to the reaction of the bulk of the Indian Press, the Muslim League's *Dawn* condemned Asaf Ali's plea for a hearing for the Jews and said it should disillusion "those few" in the Arab world who might have set store by the professions of "the Hindu Congress" about its support for the Arab cause. The Arabs, the paper said, should find comfort from the thought that "Mr. Asaf Ali does not represent Muslim India and is acting contrary to Muslim India's wishes."

Asaf Ali himself says in a report to New Delhi:

The special session of the General Assembly began in an atmosphere of suppressed excitement, and the press on the opening day carried not only special articles on the Palestine problem but also accounts of the precautions taken for the safety of the delegates. At no time, however, was there any threat of violence.

In the early stages interest centred on an assessment of the probable amount of support that the Arabs and the Jews might respectively receive from the various delegations. The five Arab States naturally pleaded the case for the stoppage of Jewish immigration into Palestine, the termination of the Mandate and the declaration of the country's independence. They did this with fervour, persistence, and on the whole with ability, but they suffered many tactical defeats through lack of forethought and coordination and a pardonable tendency to concentrate on this theme, sometimes at the expense of the specific matter which happened to be under discussion at the moment. On at least one occasion this nearly led to disastrous

results. When the General Assembly was about to pass its resolution directing the First Committee to grant a hearing to the Jewish Agency, Syrian delegate, instead of moving an amendment for the inclusion of mention of the Arab Higher Committee, made a long and repetitive speech on the general question of Palestine which had no bearing on the procedural question under discussion. The misunderstanding caused by this resolution was removed at a later session of the Assembly after India raised the matter in the First Committee.

Azzam Pasha, Secretary-General of the Arab League, was in New York throughout the session, as was a delegation of the Arab Higher Committee of Palestine under the leadership of Henry Cattán, a Christian lawyer. Azzam Pasha was aggrieved that he was not included in the Egyptian delegation but he was active behind the scenes, counselling his brother Arabs against any ill-considered action such as boycott of the General Assembly or of the Special Committee set up by it. Unfortunately his influence was not as great as might have been expected of one holding his position, and the Arabs continued to the end to speak with many voices. Thus Faris-el-Khoury of Syria declared to a correspondent of the *New York Times* after the session that the Arabs would boycott the Special Committee, while Azzam Pasha told the same correspondent that any talk of boycott was "childish nonsense".

The Jews occupy a highly important position in New York and their virtual control of the press provides them with an enormously powerful weapon. The newspapers lost no opportunity of playing up the "Red menace" whenever the Soviet delegation happened to support the Arabs and, while the independence issue was under discussion, such headlines as "Reds and India side with Arabs" were common. A striking example of the effectiveness of the pressure which the Jews are able to exercise on the United States Government was provided by the passage of the General Assembly's resolution on the grant of a hearing to the Jewish Agency. Mr. Loy Henderson, Chief of the Near East Division of the State Department and Adviser to the U.S. delegation, was heard to remark that, although the U.S. delegation deplored the affront shown to the Arabs by the accord of a preferential position to the Jewish Agency, their Government could not ignore the fact that the 3 1/2 million Jews in New York State might, in a close contest, exert a decisive influence on a presidential election. It is worthy of note that it was the U.S. delegation that suggested that India might move a resolution to soothe the Arab Higher Committee.

In general the U.S. delegation gave the impression that they were anxious to be fair to all sides, but that Jewish pressure and fear of any extension of Soviet influence in the Near and Middle East would ultimately determine their Government's attitude on the Palestine question. It would appear that they would be best pleased by the conclusion of a Trusteeship

agreement for Palestine, with the exclusion of the Soviets from any share in the country's administration, and with the continuance of efforts to establish a Jewish National Home to the satisfaction of the American if not of the Palestinian Jews.

The British delegation, reflecting the present anxiety of their Government to share their Palestinian burden with their allies across the Atlantic, acted throughout in close consultation with the U.S. Although the special session was called at their request they rarely took the initiative in discussion and confined themselves for the most part to brief statements of a more or less factual nature.

The Indian delegation, acting on its instructions, expressed itself strongly in favour of independence for Palestine, though abstaining from committing itself on questions of detail such as autonomy for the Jews. The feeling that India was definitely for the Arabs led the U.S. delegation to omit India from their original proposal regarding the constitution of the Special Committee, but the position which India had built up for herself in the course of the session made her inclusion inevitable and it is gratifying that in the final election she received the votes of the great majority including the U.S., the U.K. and the U.S.S.R.

The Palestine question is now before the Special Committee. The Committee's task is a difficult one and no one can say what the issue will be.<sup>4</sup> But whatever the result, it will be the product not simply of a consideration of the rights and claims of the Arabs and the Jews, but of the interplay of the interests of the Great Powers.

There is a sidelight on India-China relations in Asaf Ali's report. Siam (now Thailand) was admitted to the United Nations during the special session, and Asaf Ali had made a speech welcoming the new member with whom India had close cultural ties. He says, in the course of his report to New Delhi, about the attitude of the Chinese delegation:

Their attitude was frankly disappointing. Not only did they follow the Anglo-American bloc in opposing any mention of the objective of independence (for Palestine) in the Special Committee's terms of reference, but their leader, Dr. Quo Tai-Chi, was cold and aloof in private conversation. Perhaps China has already come to regard India as her great rival for the leadership of Asia. And perhaps it was this feeling that led Dr. Quo to make a speech on China's relations with Siam after I had, in welcoming that country's entry into the United Nations, described it as a member of India's cultural family.

The special session of the U.N. Assembly on the Palestine question, and India's role therein, had an interesting sequel. On 19th July 1947, Vincent Sheean--known in India for his book on Gandhiji under the title *Lead Kindly Light*--and two other friends of India, Dorothy Thompson and Ely Culbertson, wrote a letter to Asaf Ali suggesting that Gandhiji should address the United

Nations Assembly on the Palestine issue at its forthcoming regular session in September. Vincent Sheean said:

"Dear Mr. Asaf Ali,

Remembering your hospitality in Washington I have been wondering if you would not pass on to Mr. Nehru an idea which I and my friends and neighbours here, Dorothy Thompson and Ely Culbertson, think might help the United Nations through a crisis this coming September. When the Assembly meets to consider the Palestine question, could Mr. Gandhi not come here and speak for India? Nothing else would make both Arabs and Jews so aware of the necessity for peace. I realize all the difficulties and I know that Mr. Gandhi customarily travels third class on boats, which would make a tremendous journey out of this. But India has truly something to say to the whole world, particularly on a question which is fundamentally religious, and Mr. Gandhi understands better than anybody else how strong and deep religions are. He would be, I suppose, very reluctant to do this, but not only Palestine but the United Nations itself approaches a very serious crisis and possibly--possibly--India might hold us together. We don't know. But Dorothy Thompson and Ely Culbertson, who will sign this with me, believe that a great influence upon the September session could be exerted by the wisdom of India if Mr. Gandhi would consent to attend that session as Indian delegate. We know that he would speak for the Moslems as for the Hindus or Buddhists or any other religious system, as he speaks also for Christianity."

There was of course no question of Gandhiji visiting America to speak at the U.N. As Asaf Ali was to recall at a memorial meeting in New York on 7th February 1948 following the Mahatma's martyrdom, Gandhiji would decline invitations to visit other countries with the remark that he did not want to 'go before the world' till after achieving a peaceful and just social order in India.

## **Lectern and the Media**

An experienced publicist in the nationalist cause, Asaf Ali utilised in America not only the platform and the Press but the radio to present the case for Indo-U.S. cooperation, specially in the economic field. In India the radio was--as it still is--controlled by the Central Government, whereas this burgeoning mass medium was in America in the private domain and as free as the press.

The first major public relations event was a reception arranged in New York on 15th April 1947 by the India League of America. It was an organisation of patriotic Indians and American friends of India with Pearl Buck as its Chairman, and many prominent persons on its executive including Colonel Johnson who later became the Defence Secretary of the U.S., Richard Walsh, George Baldwin and Dorothy Norman. Sardar J.J. Singh, one of the moving spirits, was away in India at the time. The reception was held in Hotel Commodore. Covers were laid for more than 700 persons. Colonel Johnson regulated



the toasts and speeches.

The principal speaker from the American side was William Phillips, who had served as President Roosevelt's Personal Representative in India during 1941-44. The question uppermost in the minds of friends of India was whether the country would remain one--an agonising challenge that the United States had faced, and overcome, a century-and-a-half earlier. Following are some excerpts from Phillips' remarks:

"The coming to the United States of India's first Ambassador indicates a change in the map of the world, the entrance of a new force, a new influence, a fresh voice in world affairs, which may under certain conditions, have profound significance.

"A few years ago I was in India as the Personal Representative of President Roosevelt, but only with the honorary rank of Ambassador. I was not the genuine article as you, Mr. Ambassador, are in this country. I could not be accredited to an Indian Government because there was no such Government in existence.

"In these days of reconstruction when pieces of the world picture puzzle are laboriously being put together, no country has a monopoly of problems. Wise leadership is needed now in this country as it was in 1783, when with the end of the Revolution and the withdrawal of the British, there emerged from the clash of personalities and state interests a group of able men, including Hamilton, Madison and Jay, whose united efforts brought into being our great nation. They and their associates pleaded and argued with such force and intelligence that gradually public opinion throughout the thirteen states came to appreciate that without union in some form, the great future that lay before the country could not be realised. A powerful opposition scorned the principle of union in the fear that it would deprive them of their state rights and privileges. William Chase of Georgia observed at the time: 'Some will oppose it from pride, some from self-interest, some from ignorance, but the greater number will be of that class who will oppose it from a dread of swallowing up the individuality of the States.' The Federal Constitution which finally emerged was the outcome of twenty-five years of contest.

"Mr. Ambassador, can you wonder that we Americans are thinking of our past as we watch the events which are taking place in your country? Britain has announced her intention of withdrawing from India in June of next year; there are preplexing problems of divided interests which must be solved. But I, for one, have confidence in the wisdom of Indian leaders and in their ability to find a way to overcome their problems so that a great Indian nation will arise strong and free and in a position to contribute a powerful voice in maintaining the peace of the world. For India, geographically, occupies a unique position between East and West and her vast territory should be the natural link that unites Eastern and Western cultures.

"We are aware that India has many urgent needs. By a long series of events

the people have been cruelly impoverished. They need industrialization and other technical services for the revival of their industries. They need our active cooperation in innumerable development projects--needs which we are in a position to meet. The vastness of India, its latent power, its present seething discontent, all its immense potentialities, both political and economic, all require of us far greater knowledge than we have, wiser and deeper sympathies. Then how shall we understand this great land of India? How shall we take as well as richly give? This is a problem that will tax our wisdom. Our present knowledge of India is altogether insufficient and without sound knowledge and practical skill we can blunder, waste opportunities and create needless resentments. This then is one of the great problems before America today."

Asaf Ali writes about his response to this candid expression of sympathy and anxiety:

As advised by Mahatma Gandhi I had on this very first occasion of making a major speech carefully prepared a draft which I proposed to read out, but after listening to the American speakers--Colonel Johnson, Ambassador Phillips, George Baldwin and Pearl Buck--I found that only a fragment of my prepared speech could survive; for the rest I must speak extempore and respond to the points made.

In the course of my speech I referred to a question that I had heard over and over again: what would happen to India if the British withdrew? And after a pause I turned round, and said: "Pray, what happened to you when the British withdrew from your country?" They brought the roof down with cheers. I went on: "Today you are one of the most proud, most powerful and prosperous countries. This is the fate that awaits India after the withdrawal of the British."

I had heard another question which was equally testing: "How will you get over the centuries-old caste barriers between the high castes and the depressed classes?" In the course of my speech I repeated this and said: "In the national Cabinet of India today consisting of 14 portfolios, two of the most important are held by representatives of the very depressed classes who you think will find it hard to find their place by the side of high caste Hindus. These representatives, one holding the portfolio of Law and the other of Labour, are guiding the destinies of India sitting beside the highest-caste Hindu Brahmin, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru." Once again there were loud cheers.

On India's vast economic potential, which was waiting to be tapped, Asaf Ali spoke of the several river-based schemes for irrigation and power many of which were as ambitious as the Tennessee Valley project of the U.S., of the plans to develop transport through extension of railroads and highways, to mobilise the country's mineral resources for industrial growth, and to bring modern amenities of education and health to India's half-a-million villages. All this required billions of dollars' worth of mechanical equipment and services.

But the immediate problem was to meet the shortage of food. Though India's credit was high, with a vast reserve held in sterling, there was a stringency of dollars. This could be remedied if the U.S. business world would help India to earn dollars by buying more of Indian commodities.

Among the expressions of appreciation which Asaf Ali received after the India League reception was a letter from L.D.Seymour, President, L.D. Seymour & Company, 120, Wall Street, New York: "My dear Mr. Ambassador: May I be among the first to congratulate you on your masterful speech last night at the India League dinner in your honour. All ten at our table last night agreed, at the end of your speech, that India's relations with the United States could not have been placed in more able hands."

But there was also soon a premonition of Indo-U.S. misunderstanding. Mrs. H.W. Mallitz, a citizen of New York, wrote to Asaf Ali in June 1947: "At this rather belated date I take the liberty of saying how much I enjoyed your interesting talk given at the Commodore Hotel in New York on April 15, and I want to wish you all success in cementing the friendship of citizens of this country and the people of India.

"It troubles me a little to note from the report of Mr. J.J.Singh, following his four months' trip to India, that 'The people of India, as well as the peoples of other Asian countries, have begun to fear the United States.' This is truly a startling statement, for we, the plain rank and file of citizens, cherish a sincere desire to see India and all of the Asian countries have their freedom under their own governments. We know that the people of those countries want their homes, their families, their plot of God's own earth and perhaps their books, just as we do, and we want to see them get this, so where in God's name is the reason for fear?

"It is to be hoped that no country or countries who do not want to see India and the United States closely allied can succeed in implanting this suspicion; and we pray too, that our governmental departments will exercise wisdom and vision in the handling of economic and trade relations between our countries."

There was an interesting incident in connection with the India League reception in New York. Prime Minister Nehru in the course of a letter to Asaf Ali mentioned that he had learnt that he had distributed his photograph to the guests assembled at the reception. Nehru added that it appeared to him to be a little outre.<sup>5</sup>

Asaf Ali writes about this accusation:

I felt hurt and in my reply I told him that while I didn't care one jot for what others might say about me, it hurt me that the Prime Minister could credit even for a moment a report which attributed to me such outrageous behaviour. The fact of the matter was that the India League of America according to their established custom always publish the photograph of the guest of the evening or of the person in whose honour they hold the reception on the cover of the menu, and inside they give a brief sketch of

his life, as a souvenir for every guest. The year before, on the occasion of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's own birthday, the League had a big function and on that occasion the menu bore his picture.

How a distorted report reached the Prime Minister is still a mystery to me. In any case, Jawaharlal responded with a mollifying letter.

Asaf Ali was himself not a socialist in the sense of being wedded to public ownership of the means of production and distribution, but he faithfully expounded the Nehru Government's policy of a mixed economy in which the public sector would increasingly occupy the commanding heights but in which there would still be ample scope for private enterprise. *The New York Times* of 17th April 1947 carried the following report:

"Big Market for U.S.  
seen in Free India

But Asaf Ali warns Reciprocal Trade  
must be accepted and Limitations on  
Investment

Outlines Control Plans

Key Industries which include Defence,  
Power, Transport, Communications,  
Listed.

"Freeing of India from its colonial status means opening up a huge potential market for United States foreign trade, Asaf Ali, newly appointed Indian ambassador, told the Far East-American Council of Commerce and Industry, Inc., at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel yesterday. He warned American traders, however, that they must establish two-way trade and must accept limitations which India is imposing on the fields of investment, if the trade is to be successful.

"He told the meeting that, in addition to purely economic considerations, India continues to be the political key to the East. The use of the country in World War II as the most important strategic base in the world more than offsets, he emphasized, Mr. Churchill's claim that India owed England a debt for protecting it against Japan."

A point that Asaf Ali used to stress was that India sought cooperation in enlightened mutual interest, not charity. As he put it during a question-answer session after an address at the City Club of Cleveland, Ohio, on 29th November 1947: "The resources have been listed, and the blueprints are there. I am only in search of necessary tools, and I want you to provide the tools--for which I shall pay."

Asaf Ali spoke in similar strain at the universities, foreign policy associations, chambers of commerce and other fora at which he made about a hundred

speech during his tenure of 14 months. The questions would often be searching, and the answers quick and apt. Thus, asked if the Government of India was not dominated by one party, he said that new parties were springing up in democratic India, that the Congress Party was the dominant party at the moment but that it might become a minority if another party were to appeal more strongly to the electorate. Again, when a questioner asked whether, on India becoming industrialised the divorce rate might become higher as it had done in the U.S.A., Asaf Ali replied that if it did, he would not be sorry because he did not believe in forced unions.

Of Asaf Ali's many appearances on radio, the first network introduction to the American audience was in the National Broadcasting Company's *University of the Air* series on 'Our Foreign Policy' on 7th July 1947. Asaf Ali participated along with Dr. Wellington Koo, China's ambassador, and Sterling Fisher acted, as the moderator. The Chinese ambassador spoke of the principal threat to peace arising from "some countries" which sought to prolong unsettled conditions in the pursuit of their policy of expansion and domination. Asked by Fisher for his view, Asaf Ali said: "India's characteristic way of thinking has inclined our people to distil out of passing events the essence of reality." He identified as the threat to peace the human failing "which inclines those who are in a position to do so to follow the policy of 'grab'...If human conscience asserts itself through the United Nations Organisation, we may hope to keep this menacing element of human nature within controllable bounds."

Asaf Ali would sometimes speak of Asia as a four-letter word which comprehended a vast expanse and immense variety. In a broadcast talk on 'The Challenge of Asia' at New York on 7th December 1947, he said: "It has been the cradle and graveyard of uncounted peoples and numerous empires, and now it is the hunting ground of sociologists and a host of explorers and exploiters in many fields...If there is a challenge, it is addressed to the Asiatics themselves, who are re-entering the arena of life in the atomic age. The challenge of Asia, if others than Asians also are interested in it, consists of the simple query: Can man live by bread alone? Asia calls for balanced progress, expressed in material rhythm regulated by ethical cadence."

### **Staying Tuned with Nehru**

Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Asaf Ali from time to time about the fast developing political situation in India. On the Muslim League's insistence on the inclusion in Pakistan of the whole of Punjab and of Bengal (including their many Hindu majority districts) Nehru writes on 14th May 1947:

"It is a curious reversal of the previous position. Suhrawardy (Premier of Bengal) goes about proclaiming that Bengal is One Nation. So also Shaukat Hayat Khan and Feroz Khan Noon declare that the Punjabis are one and cannot be separated. The two-nation theory evidently does not work in Bengal and

Punjab...I imagine that one of the alternative proposals of the Viceroy will be to give the right to provinces or parts of provinces to opt out of the Union, or rather the proposed Union. Some machinery will be devised for this process which will enable Bengal and Punjab to be divided if the parts so desire it. Whether one likes it or not, this does give a large measure of self-determination to the people concerned."

Subsequently, in a telegram of 7th June 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru says to Asaf Ali: "Important to bear in mind that in case such partition takes place, it does not materially affect the national and international concept of India or the Government of India. It is in the nature of secession of some parts of India, leaving the rest intact and continuing as India. Thus our membership of U.N.O. continues as before, so also our Ambassadors and Ministers. It is open to the new State, which is seceding, to enter into fresh arrangements with other countries. Our position remains unchanged in regard to those countries."

The point is reiterated by Nehru in a subsequent communication: "I want you to appreciate this fully because there is far too much loose talk of India ending in a sense and giving place to two new States--Pakistan and Hindustan. That is completely wrong in law and fact." Nehru adds, with reference to the likely emergence of India and Pakistan as self-governing Dominions of the British Commonwealth: "Dominion Status for India must clearly be understood to be for the interim period. We are not going to give up our objective of a republic."

On foreign policy, too, Nehru supplemented his public statements with other communications. Early in 1947, when Henry Wallace, former Vice President of the U.S. who was now editor of *New Republic*, asked Nehru for an analysis of the 'present political situation in India' and suggestions on ways in which American and Indian progressives could work for common ends, Nehru said in a message: "Our first ambassador carries with him India's greetings and good wishes to the people of the U.S. He will endeavour to develop closer relations between the two countries...We propose to avoid entanglements in any blocs or groups of powers, realising that only thus can we serve not only the cause of India but of world peace. This policy sometimes leads partisans of one group to imagine that we are supporting the other group...In a world where there are still so many bloodshot eyes we have to be clear-eyed, and while being practical must also keep our ideals in view."

In March 1947, Paul Robeson, the great American Negro singer who was an admirer of the Soviet Union and was widely regarded in his own country as a crypto-Communist, wrote to Vijayalakshmi Pandit, then at the U.N., inviting her or alternatively the Indian ambassador to speak at a forthcoming meeting of the Council on African Affairs "for India and the Indian people". The matter was referred to Jawaharlal Nehru, who himself had been approached for a message. Nehru sent Robeson good wishes for the discussion which was to take place on 25th April on the theme, 'The U.N. and Colonial Freedom'. In a letter

of 7th April to his sister, Nehru says: "Personally I do not see any objection to your accepting his invitation, or even speaking there. Of course you would have to speak in general terms, avoiding anything of a controversial nature or anything likely to offend American susceptibilities. I leave it to you to decide...If for any reason you feel that you cannot or should not attend and speak, you could send a message of goodwill."

Though Jawaharlal Nehru was no uncritical admirer of the Soviet Union, and had advised the All India Trade Union Congress as early as in 1927 to avoid joining either the Second or the Third International, his basic sympathy for the Soviet Union caused misgivings in Washington. In January 1947, M.C. Chagla, on return from New York where he had served as a member of the Indian delegation to the U.N., alerted Nehru about this. Chagla said that responsible opinion in the U.S. felt that a free India would ally itself with the Soviet Union in its foreign policy. The British delegation also held the same opinion, according to Chagla. In a letter of 20th January 1947, Nehru tells Chagla: "What you have written about the impression in the U.S.A. is right enough and I have been well aware of it. The situation is a difficult one and it is not so easy to deal with it by a statement. However, we shall have to do something about it and I shall be very happy to have a chance of discussing this and allied matters with you. If you could come up to Delhi for a day or two, we could meet and have a full talk. Asaf Ali could also profit by your experience."

The persistence of the distrust of India is brought out in a letter of 23rd October 1947 from Asaf Ali to Nehru:

The international world--those who are in a responsible position--is not disturbed by the news of Punjab disorders quite so much as talk of your resignation. Of course in U.S.A., references to India going Socialist prove very disturbing. Australia's and New Zealand's Labour governments do not excite any comment, but India is looked upon as a dark horse and therefore they shy at the slightest shadow. They don't feel sure on which side of the fence India will come down in a crisis. Pronouncements such as Zhadanov's latest, which appeared in the press today, prove very unhelpful. Zhadanov is spoken of as the Second-in-Command in Russia. He is reported to have made a longish declaration, a clipping of which I enclose. The following portion of it deserves your attention: "He charged that the main objective of this camp (American) was to prepare for a new imperialistic war, a struggle with socialism and democracy and support of reactionary and anti-democratic, pro-Fascist regimes everywhere. He said that in addition to Russia the countries of Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Romania, Hungary -- and Finland partly -- were in the anti-Fascist front. He said Indonesia and the Viet-Nam Republic of Indo-China were joining, and that India, Egypt and Syria sympathise with it." I find little or no difficulty in convincing those in responsible positions here, whether in the State Department or in the Diplomatic Corps, that

India with all her war and peace potential is opposed to war, and her whole weight will be thrown into the scale of peace. But occasionally some persistent journalist or someone professing to be a serious student of international politics comes out with a blunt question: "Which side would India take, if a war broke out between the America bloc and the Russian bloc?" And he also puts another searching question, "Can India expect to get capital equipment from U.S.A. if India's developed potential is not likely to become an asset in strengthening the American foreign policy?"

As the impending partition of the sub-continent set off widespread communal riots, specially in the North-West Frontier Province and Punjab, Asaf Ali found it increasingly difficult to make his American audiences and interlocutors share the optimistic view of India's future which he presented on the basis of the big potential for economic development that was waiting to be tapped. He tells Nehru in a letter of 29th May 1947: "I have to keep smiling the whole time here, and to laugh out the forebodings of Cassandras whose number is legion--the latest additon being J.J. Singh." The President of the India League of America, on return from a visit to India, in 'hot-from-the-oven' interviews gave a grim picture of the situation in India. Asaf Ali tells Nehru that he had to resort to statistics to play down the impending human disaster of the movement of millions of refugees across the India-Pakistan border: these millions constituted but a small per cent of India's total population, and the rest lived in peace, etc.

Asaf Ali sounded an early warning against the malpractice by some Indians of over-invoicing and under-invoicing in the import-export trade which has, over the decades, led to the drain of scarce foreign exchange. He says in a letter of 13th November 1947 to Nehru: "Many instances have come to my notice in which Indian nationals holding import licences come here and through arrangements with local manufacturers and merchants they secure false invoices for the stuff bought here. They pocket the difference between the actuals and the higher prices written in the invoices, and use the dollars for speculation or the purchase of luxury goods like cars, or squander their ill-gotten gains. This leakage can be stopped if the Government would make a provision under which business men coming over here should be required to notify their purchases to the Embassy, and subject themselves to checks both here and at Home." Asaf Ali says that he discussed this with R.K. Shanmukham Chetty, then Finance Minister of India, as well as C.D. Deshmukh, Governor of the Reserve Bank, and "they agreed with me that some such checks were essential. This matter may be taken up with the Commerce and Finance Ministries."

In addition to discussing political and economic matters, Asaf Ali had to defend himself in the course of his letters to Nehru against certain innuendoes and charges against him that had been circulated in India by interested parties, including some Indian ladies of the Embassy in Washington. These stories about Asaf Ali which reached Jawaharlal Nehru's ear, as they were intended



to, involved in particular the wife of the First Secretary, M.O.A. Baig, who had acted as official hostess at Embassy parties in the absence of the Ambassador's wife and had thereby incurred the jealousy of some. Asaf Ali tells Nehru (letter of 29th May 1947):

"Please take it from me that all the stuff and nonsense which they have concocted about poor Mrs. Baig is born of sheer and venomous malice. I do not know what I could have done without her willing and loyal assistance. The cackle of stupid women here cannot affect my mental make-up of never letting down a friend.

"Now about Mrs. Baig going to New York. Yes, she did go to New York twice to attend two functions. I had to invite in the ordinary course my senior officers and their wives. Some officers turned up, others could not, or purposely did not. B.R. Sen and his wife excused themselves. And now the report you refer to singles out Mrs. Baig. That shows how well they manage to marshal their intrigues. Mrs. Baig has a brother in New York, who is a business magnate with a country house etc. (They are Egypto-Turkish Christians). She goes and stays with her brother's family, too, occasionally. But surely I am not here to allow myself to be drawn into these feminine or masculine intrigues. I have a job of work to do and Heaven knows I am doing it the best way I can. I may mention the fact that various persons have various reasons for taking a hand in this game. Someone expects to be the Head of the Chancery if Baig's goose is cooked, somebody else has a baser motive still, and so on."

Asaf Ali also kept bringing to Jawaharlal Nehru's attention problems of liaison between the Embassy and India's permanent representation at the U.N. (as well as special delegations, such as on the Kashmir issue), and of the Ambassador's administrative control, policy guidance and coordination vis a vis officers of departments other than of External Affairs (Commerce, Defence, Education, Food and Finance) posted either in Washington or New York. Some of these problems were sorted out. Asaf Ali expresses his gratification, in a letter to Nehru of 10th July 1947, that "the question of the Ambassador's powers and administrative control has been finally settled and decided by the Cabinet."

But, possibly because the decision was not communicated to those concerned all along the line, Asaf Ali had to protest against what happened during February 1948 when the Defence Ministry asked the Military Attache--Col. B.M. Kaul, who had taken over from Col. Sher Ali Khan on 15th July 1947--to negotiate the purchase of bombers and some weapons and ammunition. Asaf Ali says in a letter of 18th February 1948 to Jawaharlal Nehru:

This, he (the Military Attache) said, was probably in pursuance of the policy he had suggested in his despatches which I had seen, and which he said he had discussed with you at great length...According to him, his approach to certain high officers of the (U.S.) Army resulted in a negative reply. From this incident the Military Attache drew the conclusion that the

Army authorities and the State Department were not favourably disposed towards India!

I very greatly regret the procedure adopted by the Defence Department (of India) in this case...Matters of such importance are never pursued at the level of a military attache, whose rank is that of Lieutenant Colonel and who is not the head of a military mission. These are matters of policy and require to be delicately and discreetly handled at the highest diplomatic level before any reasonable conclusion can be drawn. I am not surprised at the result of negotiations through the Military Attache--not that he was in any way not diligent or sufficiently discreet and zealous, but because the ground was not properly prepared first at the highest diplomatic level...I am not suggesting that this procedure has been adopted by the Defence Department or by the Industries or any other Department deliberately to avoid the Ambassador's assistance. If that were so it would be most regrettable, and if I were convinced of it I would not hesitate for a second to submit my resignation. But I do maintain that even if it is done in ignorance of the proper procedure to be followed in these cases, it is a matter which must be quickly rectified for the future."

The difficulty of the choice that some civil servants faced in opting to serve the new State of Pakistan, or to continue in the service of the Indian Dominion, is brought out in the course of a letter addressed by Asaf Ali to Jawaharlal Nehru on 1st July 1947:

I am sending under a separate cover the answers of all the officers concerned to the questionnaire relating to their choice between the Indian Union and Pakistan. I am bound to inform you that this questionnaire was regarded by several officers as somewhat embarrassing because some of them felt that while there was no certainty that their choice would also mean their selection (because none can predict in which part any of them may be considered surplus to requirements), it would mean their having burnt their boats. Some of them have all their property and family ties in Pakistan regions, and it is difficult for them to make a choice. Further, questions of security and fair treatment also made them hesitate. I made it perfectly clear to them that in my official capacity I had no more to offer them than the questionnaire, but as a friend I could informally discuss with them their difficulties without for one moment allowing this discussion to be regarded as advice, personal or official. I made it quite clear to everyone that it was a matter of perfectly free choice for each of them.

Asaf Ali was probably the first to suggest that India should have a permanent representative at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York. He says in the course of a letter of 4th June 1947 to Jawaharlal Nehru:

A permanent delegation is to my mind an absolute necessity, both from the point of view of economy and the continuity of policy. Fresh delegations have to go through their paces afresh, and take time to familiarise

themselves with policies and personalities...But I must point out that this work has to be entrusted to one who holds a high position in the counsels of the Government at Home and who, by virtue of his personality and a firm grasp of the fundamental principles of international politics and history, should be able to command the esteem of his colleagues in the United Nations.

In a letter of 4th November 1947, Asaf Ali stresses the importance of determining early whether India needed American economic cooperation on a substantial scale, and of putting in our bid early, since otherwise we were liable to find ourselves at the tail end of the queue:

There seems to be a feeling among those who have been studying American policy of loans to Europe that if India is at all thinking of any monetary assistance from the Export-Import Bank or from the Monetary Fund or the World Bank, the time for approaching this question is running fast, and in another six to eight weeks it may be altogether too late. This is a question which, in my opinion, the Cabinet and the Finance Department ought to tackle without delay.

While general opinion in business circles has not suffered any severe reverse of expectations of business with India, there is a sharp querulousness all round. The question of European rehabilitation is absorbing most of their attention to begin with. And while India is still considered a potential market, it is felt that with the Government's preoccupation with conditions bordering on civil war, constructive projects are likely to be neglected until a calmer atmosphere has been restored. In any case, security of investments is not regarded altogether beyond doubt.

## NOTES

1. *Roosevelt, Gandhi, Churchill: America and the last phase of India's freedom struggle* by M.S.Venkataramani & B.K. Shrivastava, Radiant, 1983.
2. In the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Second Series), ed. S.Gopal
3. The reference is to a telegraphic request by Asaf Ali to Jawaharlal Nehru to send Chandralekha Pandit, daughter of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, to Washington to assist him.
4. The Special Committee on Palestine was divided in its views. The majority report (November 1947), violently opposed by Arab States, proposed partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish States with an international regime for Jerusalem and an economic union of the three units. The minority plan called for an independent federal State. The General Assembly of the United Nations accepted the majority plan.
5. Jawaharlal Nehru shared his reaction with his sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit, to whom he says in a letter of 22nd May 1947: "I have been considerably put out also about the Asaf Ali picture business. I have written to him about it. There is far too much Hollywood about the Embassy and its work"

# 11. A Free, Diminished India

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During a debate on the India question in the British House of Commons on 16th May 1946, it fell to a Communist M.P. to give a fitting retort to Tories who professed concern for the Muslim minority. When William Gallacher asked for transfer of power to the major political party in India, the Congress, Earl Winterton (he had been Under-Secretary of State for India in the 1920's and a Cabinet Member during 1938-39) intervened to ask, "What about the Muslims?" Galacher answered: "There was a majority at the general elections, and the Labour Party set up a Government. What about the Tories?"<sup>1</sup>

Reginald Sorensen, the Labour M.P., characterised the two-nation theory as a conception leading to 'theocratic totalitarianism'. When mass violence and killings were touched off in Calcutta on 16th August 1946 during the 'Direct Action' launched by the Muslim League, even the Rightist *Daily Telegraph* of London squarely blamed "the incredible folly of the Muslim Government in Bengal in proclaiming the Direct Action Day as a public holiday." But the increasing awareness of the illogic and danger of partition, whether among sections of British public opinion or of the new Viceroy in India, Lord Mountbatten, came too late. The Frankenstein's monster of separatism which a succession of British Viceroys had created could not be contained.

## The Drift to Partition

Maulana Azad had been a staunch supporter of the Cabinet Mission scheme of May 1946 because it would have preserved India undivided. There would be a federal government having jurisdiction over External Affairs, Defence, Communications and also Finance to the extent necessary for sustaining these responsibilities. British India was to be divided into three groups of provinces: one comprising Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan; a second comprising Bengal and Assam; and the third the rest. The Union constitution was to be drawn up by a constituent assembly consisting of members chosen by the existing provincial legislatures and by representatives

of princely States which joined the Union. Members representing the three groups of provinces were to meet separately to draw up the constitutions of the groups which could exercise some powers outside the federal subjects, as well as to draw up the constitution of the provinces in each group. Any province could opt out of the federal union after elections were held under the new constitution.

This complicated scheme was viewed with misgiving by many because it would keep Hindu-majority Assam and the Hindu-majority districts of Bengal in the Muslim-dominant eastern group, and the large non-Muslim (Hindu and Sikh) population of Punjab in the Muslim-dominant western group. It is interesting but futile to speculate whether the gruesome killings and mass migrations that accompanied partition might have been averted if the Cabinet Mission plan had been implemented and the division of Punjab and Bengal thereby avoided.

The sequence of events which resulted in abandonment of the Cabinet Mission scheme began with a statement by Jawaharlal Nehru as Congress president, at a press conference in Bombay on 10th July 1946, that the Congress had agreed only to participate in the Constituent Assembly and regarded itself free to modify the grouping arrangement. Following this, the Muslim League Council, meeting at Bombay on 27th July, rejected the Cabinet Mission plan on the ground that it had been disowned by the Congress president. It also decided to launch 'direct action' to achieve Pakistan. These developments led Maulana Azad to regret, in retrospect, that he had proposed Jawaharlal Nehru's election to succeed him as Congress president in 1946. In Azad's own words in *India Wins Freedom*:

"On 26th April 1946, I issued a statement proposing his (Nehru's) name for the Presidentship and appealing to Congressmen that they should elect Jawaharlal unanimously. I acted according to my best judgement but the way things have shaped since then has made me realise that this was perhaps the greatest blunder of my political life. I have regretted no action of mine so much as the decision to withdraw from the presidentship of the Congress at this critical juncture...

"My second mistake was that when I decided not to stand myself, I did not support Sardar Patel. We differed on many issues but I am convinced that if he had succeeded me as Congress President he would have seen that the Cabinet Mission plan was successfully implemented. He would have never committed the mistake of Jawaharlal which gave Mr. Jinnah the opportunity of sabotaging the plan. I can never forgive myself when I think that if I had not committed these mistakes, perhaps the history of the last ten years would have been different."

Louis Fischer says in his introduction to the American edition of Maulana Azad's memoirs that at the conclusion of the July 1946 press conference he asked Nehru: 'Have you not changed the whole basis of the Cabinet Mission's scheme?' And Nehru replied he was well aware that he had. Nehru's reasoning,

as he had told Asaf Ali during their conversations at Ahmadnagar Fort, was that a partitioned India with a strong Centre would be more conducive to planned economic development than a united India with a weak Centre. But it was his ill fortune to have to acknowledge towards the end of his life, and of a long tenure as free India's first Prime Minister: "One thing that distresses me very greatly is that...there is a good number of people in India who have not profited by planning, and whose poverty is abysmal and most painful. I begin to think more and more of Mahatma Gandhi's approach." <sup>2</sup> Nehru died within months of his awakening to the truth that he and his colleagues in the government had marked not much more than a "change of masters from white to brown". <sup>3</sup>

The story of the last effort to persuade Jinnah to agree to a federal scheme which would preserve the unity of India was narrated by Mountbatten in the course of the Nehru Memorial Lecture he delivered at Cambridge on 14th November 1968: "I first tried very hard to revive the Cabinet Mission plan with him (Jinnah) in order to retain the unity of India but he wouldn't hear of it. He insisted on the partition of India into a Muslim State, to be called Pakistan, and the very large non-Muslim residue, which he used to refer to as Hindustan. He wished to include not only the provinces, like Sind, which had a very large Muslim majority, but also Bengal and Punjab which had very large non-Muslim minorities. I told him that if he insisted on partitioning India he would have to agree to partition these two provinces and only to include the Muslim majority areas in Pakistan. He objected violently to 'a moth-eaten Pakistan'. He pointed out that it was unreasonable to divide these two great provinces, as their inhabitants were primarily Bengalis or Punjabis, which was more important than whether they were Muslims or Hindus. I then applied the same logic to the whole of India, claiming that a man was Indian first and foremost before he was a Muslim or Hindu. Therefore the whole of India should not be partitioned. This annoyed him...I tried to tempt Jinnah by offering him Bengal and Punjab unpartitioned provided he would agree that though the provinces with Muslim majorities would have self-government they must be within an overall federal government at the centre. However, he said he would sooner have a moth-eaten Pakistan that owed no allegiance to a central government than a larger and more important area which came under it. I then ascertained from the Congress and Sikh leaders that, heart-broken though they were at the very thought of partitioning India, if the Muslim League would not accept a transfer of power on any other basis they would have no option but to accept if they were not to remain indefinitely under British rule."

Gandhiji saw that his opposition to India's partition was being found inconvenient, and that he was therefore being ignored by the leaders of the Congress who were negotiating directly with Lord Mountbatten. But he reiterated his opposition to partition till as late as 1st June 1947: "People now ask me to retire to Kashi or go to the Himalayas. I laugh and tell them that the Himalayas of my penance are where there is misery to be alleviated, oppression

to be relieved. There can be no rest for me so long as there is a single person in India whether man or woman, young or old, lacking the necessities of life...Let not the coming generations curse Gandhi for being a party to India's vivisection." The Congress Working Committee met in Delhi for considering the Mountbatten scheme for partition that was formally announced on 3rd June 1947. Under this scheme, in view of the increasing scale of communal violence which was having a bad effect on the administration, the date for transfer of power was advanced from June 1948 to 15th August 1947. At the meeting of the Congress Working Committee the only 'regular members' to oppose partition, says S. Gopal in the first volume of his biography of Nehru, were the "two Gandhis"--the Mahatma and the Frontier Gandhi.

However, Gandhiji soon reconciled himself to what seemed inevitable. He said at his prayer meeting on 9th June 1947: "Lately I have been receiving a large number of letters attacking me. A friend points out how ineffective were my words when I said that vivisection of the country would be the vivisection of my own body, and calls upon me strongly to oppose the partition of the country...When I said that the country should not be divided, I was confident that I had the support of the masses. But when the popular view is contrary to mine, should I force my own view on the people?" This inclination to follow, rather than to shape, public opinion was in curious contrast to Gandhiji's affirmation less than a year earlier: "I must continue to bear testimony to Truth even if I am forsaken by all." (*Harijan*, 25th August 1946).

On 14th June 1947, addressing the All India Congress Committee (in Hindi) in Delhi, Gandhiji said: "You will no doubt agree that no one could be as much hurt by the division of the country as I am. And I don't think that anyone can be as unhappy today as I am. But what has happened has happened." He advised the members of the A.I.C.C. to stand by their leaders and not to oppose the official resolution welcoming the British Government's partition scheme of 3rd June 1947. Shankerrao Dev, who had been angry with Asaf Ali in 1944 for advocating acceptance of partition if it was unavoidable, was among those present at the historic A.I.C.C. session; he now accepted partition. The official resolution, accepting the partition plan, was moved on behalf of the Working Committee by Govind Ballabh Pant. Maulana Azad, while seconding the resolution, disagreed with Pant's view that the 3rd June 1947 scheme was better than the 16th May 1946 proposals of the Cabinet Mission. But Azad felt that there was no alternative, in view of the communal strife in the country and the Muslim League's obstinacy. He expressed his confidence, however, that partition would be short-lived.

Jawaharlal Nehru commended the acceptance of partition in order to arrest the drift towards anarchy and chaos. A strong Central government, he said, was necessary; no progress and planning was possible in a forced Union.

Among those who opposed the proposal were three nationalist Muslims: Ansar Harwani, Maulana Hifzur Rahman and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew. "This is

surrender", Dr. Kitchlew said. "With proper mass contact programme, communalism can be defeated." Non-Muslim opponents of the partition scheme included Purushottam Das Tandon, who said: "Compared to the people and to the country, the Working Committee is a small thing. Acceptance of the resolution will be abject surrender to the British and to the Muslim League. The Working Committee has failed you but you have the strength of millions behind you, and you must reject this resolution." Aruna Asaf Ali, who was at that time President of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee, spoke for Congress Socialists and opposed the resolution. She said that the leaders had been caught in a British trap. Also opposed to the official resolution was Jagat Narain Lal who had moved the non-official resolution, ruling out partition, that had been passed by the A.I.C.C. at Allahabad in May 1942. Swami Sahajananda was another outspoken critic. The official resolution was carried by 157 votes to 29.

### **A Socialist Visitor to America**

When Aruna Asaf Ali saw off her husband at Karachi airport in February 1947, India was undivided and the Cabinet Mission's scheme still held the field. The situation changed drastically by 3rd June 1947 when the new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, announced the plan drawn up by him and approved by the British Government for partition of the sub-continent and transfer of power to the Dominions of India and Pakistan by mid-August.

Aruna had spoken her mind frankly at the meeting of the All India Congress Committee in Delhi during June 1947 which approved the partition scheme by a big majority. Dispirited by the turn of events, she was no longer averse to getting away from it all and joining Asaf Ali for some time in Washington. She made it clear, however, that she wanted no part of the high-society life of an ambassador's wife, and would like to apply her visit to 'rest and study'.

Asaf Ali writes to her on 19th June 1947:

Your speech (at the A.I.C.C. meeting) was reported here in the press, pointing up the fact that the Ambassador and his wife held different views...Some social activity is inevitable here, but of course it is entirely for you to decide to regulate it according to your convenience. Let me, however, warn you that there is not a single person here with whom I come into contact who doesn't enquire when you are expected, and most of the ladies of the other Embassies have over and over again expressed their desire to meet you.

I cannot judge the extent of your responsibility as President of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee, but I expect that it throws a lot of burden on you. Similarly I am not quite certain of the extent of the burden of duties arising out of your paper (the weekly *Janata*) and your party (the Congress Socialist Party). But I hope it will be possible for you to depute all this



work to a second in command, and give yourself a quiet and restful time away from daily cares. You may rest assured that the world is not going to end either this year or the next, and the millions for whom you and I and all of us work can afford to allow us to have a little respite. I admit that service to humanity is the only objective worth living for, but efficiency is essential for such service. And none can maintain his or her efficiency if continued wear and tear is suffered to allow the mechanism to deteriorate. That is why we are insisting on shorter hours of work and sufficient time for recreation and recuperation for everyone...I hope the Bank has been regular in advising you of credit...You asked me in one of your letters what exactly I would like you to do with the books. My original idea was, and I still think it is correct, that the Law books should be deposited with Jamia Millia. But the other books will be a problem. Perhaps you can select some to be sent with the servants (by sea), and the others may remain with Maulana--or all of them may be left with Maulana if it is not inconvenient to him. As for the other stuff, you can dispose of things in any manner you think best.

As it happened, Asaf Ali and Aruna met first in London. Following the climactic of the sub-continent's partition, Asaf Ali needed to visit New Delhi for consultations. He left towards the close of August 1947 on a three-week visit. By that time Aruna had made her travel plans which in any case included a stop-over in London. Jawaharlal Nehru writes to Krishna Menon on 23rd August 1947: "Aruna Asaf Ali will be going to London soon. She will meet Asaf Ali there and then stay on for two or three weeks. I hope you will give her every help during her stay." In a subsequent cable to Krishna Menon on 11th September, Jawaharlal Nehru says: "Horrors in West and East Punjab. Delhi situation improving. Frontier Province situation bad. Northern U.P. situation tense. Bright spot Bengal due to Gandhiji. Please show this message to Aruna Asaf Ali. She should not return to India but carry on with her programme."

Asaf Ali was deeply disheartened by what he saw and what he heard in Delhi. Maddened by the accounts of atrocities suffered and witnessed by the tens of thousands of refugees who were pouring every week into Delhi from the North-West Frontier Province and West Punjab, many Hindus in Delhi took it out on local Muslims. Many of the influentials and the well-to-do among Delhi Muslims, including men and officers of the police force, had left for Pakistan. Vulnerable and leaderless, the Muslims found a valiant defender in Jawaharlal Nehru. He insisted that innocent Muslims in Delhi should not be punished for the crimes committed against equally innocent Hindus in West Pakistan. This was the higher morality of unilateral right-doing commended by Mahatma Gandhi.

But some of Jawaharlal Nehru's Congress colleagues pointed out that adherence to this higher morality could not be expected of the generality of men and women, who only know and are moved by the ordinary morality of

reciprocal obligation. These colleagues included the then Congress President J.B. Kripalani. He said in his address to a meeting of the All India Congress Committee on 15th November 1947: "We should frankly tell League-minded Muslims that though we, Congressmen and our Governments, are determined to protect them, we can't do so merely on the strength of our police and army...The safety of the Muslims must come from their Hindu neighbours who form a majority of the population and from whom the majority in the ranks of the police and army must come. These will not be active in affording this protection unless they know that their co-religionists in Pakistan are getting a fair deal."

Maulana Azad, for his part, pointed out frankly and with sorrow to Muslims that they had themselves brought disaster on their heads. Addressing a congregation at the Jama Masjid, he said: "Aren't you living in a constant state of fear? This fear is your own creation. It was not long ago when I warned you that the two-nation theory was death-knell to a meaningful, dignified life. I told you that the pillars upon which you were leaning would inevitably crumble. To all this you turned a deaf ear."

Communal prejudice had reached such a pitch that rumours were circulating in Delhi to the effect that Asaf Ali had worked in Washington to promote Pakistan's interests at India's expense, and that he had therefore been recalled. Tendulkar reports Gandhiji saying at a prayer meeting in Delhi on 13th September 1947 that 'he wished to refer to a vague insinuation against Asaf Ali Saheb, their ambassador in America. Asaf Ali had been a Congressman ever since the speaker had known him. He had been a good friend of the late Hakim Saheb and Dr. Ansari, as he was of the Maulana Saheb, who was Congress President for many years and had always been known as a staunch nationalist. He (Gandhiji) knew that Asaf Ali Saheb was not recalled from America, but that he had come to consult the Prime Minister on many important questions.' The campaign of calumny against Asaf Ali showed how partitioned India stood diminished not only territorially but morally.

Asaf Ali rejoined Aruna in London and travelled back with her to his post in Washington. Aruna was too much out of sympathy with post-war U.S.A., engaged in a bitter cold war with the U.S.S.R., to enjoy her stay in America. She would have liked to meet and talk to pro-Soviet liberals in America like the great Negro singer Paul Robeson, but could not do so. But she found instructive the periodical *Problems of Communism*, a scholarly enterprise sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

Much later, Evelyn Peyton Gordon wrote about the Asaf Alis in the *Washington Daily News* on 25th July 1951, when Asaf Ali had returned to India and was Governor of Orissa: "Mme. Asaf Ali, whom Washington knew slightly because she was so rarely here--she spent much time lecturing in Mexico and neighbouring countries-- was an underground worker in the revolutionary days of India. Her husband...has returned to India from a three-month tour of Europe.

Aruna Asaf Ali has returned to India from a three-month tour of Russia at the invitation of the Soviet government. She is an avowed socialist, as Washington knew during her brief residence here. Once a society beauty, member of a high-caste family of India, she married Asaf Ali soon to find that their political differences were mighty. She is one of the few people from outside Russia who has been permitted to 'see everything'. She was even allowed to travel in Asiatic-Moslem Russia--Turkistan and the lands around the Caspian Sea. She went as she chose, saw what she desired, and seems to believe that as far as Russia is concerned everything is just dandy."

### **Gandhiji's Martyrdom**

Gandhiji tended to apply stricter standards to Hindus than to Muslims. When the Arya Samaj in Hyderabad launched a Satyagraha in 1939 for securing freedom of worship for Hindus, as well as for representative institutions and democratic government, Gandhiji advised the Hyderabad State Congress to call off its own civil disobedience on the ground that "the Arya League and the Hindu Mahasabha activities should not be confused with that of the State Congress...The struggle has assumed a communal colour. If you resume your civil disobedience, it will be very difficult for you to retain your nationalistic character...Mixing up of motives is damaging in any species of Satyagraha, but in religious Satyagraha it is altogether inadmissible. It is fatal to use or allow religious Satyagraha to be used as a cloak or a device for advancing an ulterior political or mundane objective." (*Harijan* of 20th January, 18th February and 27th May 1939.) Gandhiji further explained in a letter to Amrit Kaur on 31st July: "I was anxious not to embarrass His Exalted Highness the Nizam's government as long as I could help it."

But Gandhiji had no similar compunction in relation to the 'Quit Kashmir' movement subsequently launched by Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference (originally founded as the Muslim Conference) against the autocratic rule of the Hindu Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir. At a prayer meeting on 25th December 1947, Gandhiji said: "The Maharaja should clearly say that he is no longer the Ruler, it is the Muslims of Kashmir who are the real rulers, and they may do what they like." This was after the Maharaja's accession to India--supported by Sheikh Abdullah--following invasion of the State by raiders armed and trained by Pakistan. In deference to Gandhiji's wish that the people of a princely State should decide whether they wanted to be part of India or of Pakistan, and in accordance with Lord Mountbatten's advice, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made the acceptance of the State's accession provisional and subject to the people's verdict in a plebiscite--a self-imposed limitation that was to prove embarrassing. Soon Gandhiji, through a saintly quixotism that struck some as appeasement of Pakistan, generated a controversy. He undertook a fast with two objectives. One, and it was nobly conceived, was to restore a

sense of security among the Muslims still living in Delhi. The other object was, in a turning of the other cheek that he used to commend to Hindus as the way to convert recalcitrants among Muslims, to make the Indian government reverse its decision to postpone the payment of (not repudiate) the sum of Rs.500 million that was Pakistan's remaining share of undivided India's cash balances. Pakistan was at that time engaged in promoting a tribal invasion of Jammu & Kashmir. The Indian authorities reasoned that payment of the money to Pakistan at that juncture would strengthen its ability to sustain the invasion. Eventually Gandhiji had his way. It was a case of the exercise of moral power without the political responsibility of governance. On 30th January 1948, Gandhiji was shot dead by a militant Hindu who saw the Mahatma as an appeaser.

Aruna Asaf Ali was to leave New York that very day on her journey back to India. Asaf Ali had come with her from Washington to see her off. It was in a room at the airport hotel that the news of Gandhiji's assassination struck them like a thunderbolt. Asaf Ali bent his head over the table where he was seated, his body convulsed with sobs, and wept like a child. "I have never seen a man", says Aruna Asaf Ali, "weep like that."

On 1st February 1948, NBC presented a Round Table on Gandhiji organised by the University of Chicago with a radio link-up of participants from Washington (M.Asaf Ali); Chicago (Sir Mohammed Zafrullah Khan, Foreign Minister of Pakistan who was representing his country at the U.N. Security Council); and New York (N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, India's Minister Without Portfolio and representative at the U.N. Security Council). There were two American participants: Dr. John Haynes Holmes, Pastor of the Community Church, New York; and Milton Mayer, author.

On 7th February 1948 the India League of America organised a public memorial meeting at the Town Hall in New York with twenty speakers from different parts of the world. J.J.Singh, who presided, asked the audience to stand in silence for a minute, and also requested them not to applaud at any time. He then called out the speakers in alphabetical order. There happened to be three Indians among the first four. The opening speaker was Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, head of the emergency government of Jammu & Kashmir and president of the All-India States Peoples' Conference. He recalled that he had had the honour of spending many hours in the company of the great man: "One thing I found was that I was never awed by his august presence. He completely took everybody into his confidence because he had totally identified himself with the masses."

Asaf Ali's turn was next. Time and again, he said, Mahatma Gandhi was invited by other countries, and his answer always used to be : 'How ridiculous that I should leave my country in this state and go to the world and preach to them. Let me achieve justice here before I go before the world.'

Then followed Warren Austin, U.S. representative to the Security Council of the United Nations. The next speaker was N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, who

was presenting India's case on the Kashmir issue before the Security Council. He recalled that he had met the Mahatma only two hours before leaving Delhi on his present mission. Gandhiji had said he would keep praying "every moment" for an amicable settlement of the dispute between India and Pakistan.

The sixteen speakers who followed were: Emanuel Celler, member of the U.S. House of Representatives; Jean-Willy Fournier de Montousse (French Representative to the U.N. Security Council); Faris El-Khoury (Syrian Representative to the Security Council); Nasrollah Entazam (Iranian Representative to the Security Council); John Haynes Holmes (Minister, Community Church of New York); M.A. Hassan Ispahani (Pakistan's Ambassador to the U.S.); Sir Mohammed Zafrullah Khan (Pakistan's Foreign Minister and head of the country's delegation to the Security Council); Frank Kingdom (author and columnist); Charles Malik (Lebanese diplomat and Chairman of the U.N. Economic and Social Council); General A.G.L. McNaughton (Canadian Representative to the Security Council); Philip Noel-Baker (United Kingdom Representative to the Security Council); Ali Sastroamidjojo (Education Minister of Indonesia and delegate to the U.N.); Norman Thomas (American Socialist leader); Ting-Fu Tsiang (Chinese Representative to the Security Council); Walter White (Secretary of the U.S. National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People); and Lin Yutang (Chinese philosopher and author).

Conspicuous was the absence, among the speakers, of a representative of the Soviet Union--the only one of the Big Five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council not to participate in the memorial meeting. There were messages from several who could not come, including Albert Einstein, the scientist; Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of President Roosevelt who was prominent in American public life in her own right; and Dr. Stephen S. Wise, President of the American Jewish Congress. There was no message from any Soviet citizen, official or non-official. In 1948, the Communist rulers of the Soviet Union believed that Mahatma Gandhi stood for feudal and capitalist interests.

Asaf Ali's loneliness was, if anything, intensified after the few months that his wife spent with him in America. Some days after seeing Aruna off at New York airport, he writes to her on 4th February 1948 from Washington a letter which begins with a reference to Gandhiji's assassination: "Something within me tells me that even in his death he has served India's best interests to an amazing degree. He has thrown a mantle of protection around Jawahar and others who are in a position to hold the torch of his spirit aloft." He goes on to speak of his own vulnerability to loneliness--only to return soon to the subject of Gandhiji: "Isn't it a tragedy (on the puny personal scale) that just as a bridge seemed to have spanned a gulf of years--what seemed to me centuries--you were called back by your sense of higher duty? But life, in spite of what looks a scheme of intended organisation, is just a series of undreamt of accidents. Just think of the great consequences which have affected the life of hundreds of millions of human beings because a demented criminal had a pistol which

hundreds around Gandhiji proved helpless to prevent from going off! Thus history weaves its crazy pattern in individual, national and international life. And yet who can deny that man has gone forward during these half a million years since he lived in caves like his cousins, the beasts of the forest. What do we seek? Self-satisfaction? And at what cost? Gandhiji insisted on renunciation and the minimum of surrender to the body. Was he right? The world goes in the opposite direction, and struggles and strifes follow. Which is the right path? The Gita says, 'He who is in doubt is annihilated' or words to that effect. Gandhiji was no doubter. He lived fully and died gloriously. All honour to those who can live like him." Asaf Ali adds postscripts which again strike a personal note: "Please let me have your own news fast. Remember, I am a *friend*, in a sense which may not be fully clear but which is true. Please give my best regards to all--and love to your relations and my relations. And assure Maulana and Jawahar of my deep anxiety and affection. Sometimes I feel I ought to fly back--but..."

In a letter of 8th February 1948 he says to Aruna: "The Press, the churches, and hundreds of organisations have devoted a great deal of space and time to tributes of a very high order. Many have gone so far as to say, 'Choose between Gandhi's way or the atom bomb.' If only India lives up to his dreams, India will lead the world...Gandhi will be recognised, in good time, as the greatest corrective of this age. Lenin erred on the score of force or violence, I venture to think; and Gandhi saw the error by instinct. The ancient sages of India, Hindu or pre-Hindu (the Aryans are pre-Hindu) summed up human failings under four heads relating to the flesh, and the fifth, the Ego: *kam* (fleshly appetite or any desire); *krodh* (anger); *lobh* (greed), *moh* (infatuation, or the nearest word may be obsession). Gandhiji knew human nature. He first captured and then released forces resulting in elemental upheavals--bringing much good, not unmixed with its opposite by reaction, in their train. But beware of reactions. All must pull together in the same direction and to the common goal, or else the impatient, or yet again the saboteurs, will inflict nameless horrors on the innocent."

What Asaf Ali means by the pulling together, in the same direction, of all persons of goodwill is made explicit in a subsequent letter (12th February 1948). The letter shows, besides, that the pain of Asaf Ali's loneliness was compounded by his coming to know of the circulation in Delhi of hostile rumours concerning him:

This house (2700 Macomb Street) has become a sepulchre, and sometimes I feel like one buried here. But I suppose this is the penalty in life for having conflicting desires. Sometimes I feel like flying back to India--to do what? I cannot decide.

The latest rumour received here is that B.N. Rau is succeeding me. The reporter of the rumour has also said about me: "There are all sorts of fantastic stories in circulation about him--he is supposed to be 'misbehaving'." So there is a fine certificate for me.

I am glad Jai Prakash (Narayan) has come out with some programme. But in no case should there be the slightest hint by the progressives of going out of the Congress. This is the time--a god-given chance--of consolidating and purging the Congress, and rallying round the man of the moment, Jawahar, and his Government. May it be granted to all right-thinking ones to pull themselves together to face the realities of the situation and to help the Government to re-establish respect for its writ. Otherwise the country will dissolve into dark chaos for God knows how long.

The point is reiterated with emphasis in the next letter (26th February 1948):

Your statement is excellent. You have to rally round some established figure with a vision. Jawaharlal Nehru is the man. All party divisions should be obliterated and all thoughts of holding this or that party in reserve for the future should be completely conquered in the interest of building up one progressive and clear-sighted party with painstakingly worked out blueprints for national construction. Impatience should be controlled, except *ordered* impatience with reactionary and counter-revolutionary and anti-social forces. Even impatience with gradualness should be strictly controlled, and directed to helpful criticism. Please forgive me if this reads like a sermon It is my sincere view.

The joint front of progressive forces envisaged by Asaf Ali did not take shape. On the contrary, when the Congress imposed a ban on dual membership, in its new 1948 constitution, the Socialists chose to leave the Congress instead of remaining in the parent body and strengthening the hands of Jawaharlal Nehru as against the conservatives. Aruna herself moved more and more towards Marxism and found even the Socialists wanting in radicalism. In 1951, after returning to India from a visit to the Soviet Union, she came out with a pamphlet on 'The Socialist Party: Its Rejection of Marxism'. She associated herself with the Communist Party of India for a time, leaving it when she could no longer stomach the then Stalinist line of denigrating Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. It was only in the mid-1950's that she came to appreciate the correctness of Asaf Ali's perception of the need for all progressive forces to work together.

### **For Economic Pragmatism**

In the interval, during the second quarter of the year 1948, between his return from the ambassadorial assignment in the U.S.A. and his posting as Governor of Orissa, Asaf Ali enjoyed an unaccustomed freedom of public expression. For many years before independence, as a close friend and interpreter of the Congress President (not only of the words but the mind of Maulana Azad), Asaf Ali expressed his views on controversial issues in the rapidly developing political situation only in the privacy of Congress Working Committee meetings. Then came the public offices that he held as ambassador and Governor,

which too inhibited free expression. In a lengthy statement to the Press during the interregnum when he could speak with some candour, Asaf Ali gently and by indirect references expressed an approach to certain problems different from that of Jawaharlal Nehru. For instance, building a magnificent city (Chandigarh) designed by a foreigner did not seem to Asaf Ali an appropriate response to the challenge of rehabilitating the millions uprooted by partition and pouring into India as refugees. Nehru dreamed of building up Soviet-style heavy industries, on the one hand, and introducing cooperative joint farming on the model of Communist China on the other--without the indispensable condition of a totalitarian State apparatus. In contrast, Asaf Ali pleaded for a pragmatic approach to the regeneration of India's economy--including the dismantling of bureaucratic controls--and for what might be described as an invitation to agriculturist Non-Resident Indians to return and give a helping hand in building up a new India. Following are extracts from the public statement issued by Asaf Ali:

There are times when planning and execution can be geared to long-term developments; but when immediate human needs press hard against powers of endurance, it is politic and imperative to lower the restrictive barriers and let individual effort follow the course of urgent needs. The problems which the refugees are facing today, for instance, cannot wait till beautifully planned towns will start rising. Industries and commerce are similarly chafing because essential commodities, it is said, are not moving as they should. Stocks of coal are said to be lying idle on loading sites for want of empty wagons, and freight-cars cannot be had except on clandestine payments of high sums to individuals. If this is true, the blood-stream of the country's body economic will secrete impurities and produce pernicious anaemia.

An aggravation of a disease of the body social, also a hangover of the past, is the general tendency of smearing, and pulling one another to pieces. Nobody seems to find much good in anybody, else, and everyone seems to find much in everyone else which unfits him for any position in national life. I refuse to believe that things are as grey and gloomy as exaggerated accounts in circulation make them out to be. But an administrator cannot afford to overlook even a patently wrong state of mind among the people. On the one hand drastic measures to root out laxity, want of discipline and integrity wherever found, and on the other the propagation of healthy and robust patriotism among the people are imperatively called for. Simultaneously with this, the services of experienced industrialists, businessmen, labour leaders, agrarian experts, economists, sociologists and scientists have to be brought into commission to formulate practical plans and schemes, and to execute them. The ways of the Secretarial bureaux, howsoever good in normal times, are not suitable for unprecedented emergencies. The wartime push button procedure in which the



Americans set an example to the world may have led to financial extravagance; but it answered the purpose.

Even if businessmen are unduly driven by the profit motive, Government has the taxation machinery to squeeze out the water, and the resources thus raised can be ploughed back into the economic soil of the land. But the immediate needs of the people must be met as quickly as possible, which businessmen in constant session can help to realise.

Mr. Birla's five year plan recently released is a timely contribution to constructive thinking. It can form the basis of a fruitful discussion of the immediate tasks for developing the country's untapped resources. Much precious time has already been consumed by political crises. The economic problems of the people, both individual and collective, have reached a point when they must claim the most immediate attention. Money, labour and organisation are the elements which if brought together with such incentives as human nature demands, can do a great deal to change the atmosphere. Academic discussions and indignant diatribes for and against capitalism and socialism do not and cannot feed the ill-nourished nor clothe the ill-clad nor yet provide the homeless with shelter. The test of patriotism today is not the capacity of the critic to undermine confidence in the Government and its measures, or to unnerve the public services by vague and unsubstantiated charges. This may have been effective political strategy in the past to dislodge the foreign Government. The test of patriotism today is the capacity of the people to offer organised aid to the Government of the day in a constitutional manner, and to help themselves with such assistance as the government can provide. The immediate need of the country is industrialisation and increasing the produce of the land. Both of these can be taken in hand by the people themselves. Today individual enterprise appears to be an absolute necessity unless the people are prepared to postpone the satisfaction of their immediate requirements for long-term plans along socialistic lines.

Mr. Birla's plan is attractive. As a businessman of proved acumen he has envisaged the raising of a loan in the U.S. Right in the beginning of my term as Ambassador in America, I received from private businessmen offers of large loans amounting to between one and two billion dollars for self-paying constructive projects. The policy of the Government regarding such proposals at the time was one of examining their implications without any commitments one way or the other. In my opinion the time has come when definite decisions have to be taken. There are very few countries which can meet some of the principal requirements of India within a reasonable period, and the U.S.A. is certainly the most important of them all. But the U.S.A.'s local and foreign commitments mean such heavy calls on their production that if we are not on the list almost at once we may have to go a long way down the queue.

Our primary requirement is food, and while the produce of the cultivated land can be increased by modern methods and fertilisers, no less than fifty to sixty million acres of cultivable waste land have yet to be brought under cultivation. The immediate need is the importation of tractors and experienced men. There are nearly 2,500 experienced Indian cultivators in California, some of whom are owners of 200 to 500 acres. They would be prepared to return to India to become centres of radiation, if they are offered reasonable facilities. There are many more in Canada and they, too, might be tempted to return.

Our further requirements are capital equipment, tools and technicians, and increased means of transport and communications. We have to double and treble our coal, steel and cement production to give a push to industries and construction projects, and generation of power has to be raised to several times the existing availability. Once we get going, there will be more vacancies for enterprising and efficient men and women than the unemployed can possibly imagine today. Employment under the Government has its saturation point. But the sky is the limit to arts, crafts, industries, commerce and other private enterprises. Political controversies may lend themselves to emotional preoccupation, but they do not deliver goods.

For the moment our own needs are great, but far-seeing entrepreneurs can envisage vast markets for our goods far beyond our frontiers, throughout South-East Asia and elsewhere. India is destined to be a great and glorious land, if only we know and translate into our daily life the values of civilized life at the foundations of which lie respect for law and authority, sense of justice and fairplay, and cooperative endeavour.

Though Asaf Ali did not share Jawaharlal Nehru's predilection for State regulation of the economy and wanted private enterprise to be given full scope, he was at one with Nehru on the desirability of India pursuing a non-aligned, independent foreign policy. In the course of a letter to Nehru on 26th January 1951, Asaf Ali says:

I have just finished reading your 'Asian' broadcast of yesterday. And I am so happy to find my own feelings confirmed. You know how friendly I have been to, and how greatly I admire, the United States but they have behaved like touchy raw youths in connection with Russia, China and their friends, and made incredible mistakes in dealing with them...Thank the Powers that shape invisible thoughts, you have precisely reflected the new spirit of Asia. We only want age-long asperities and disparities to be abolished, and to usher in an era of collective human progress.

A concerted move is bound to be made by the shortsighted to press for a definite alignment with the Atlantic bloc, particularly with America, if the war situation becomes more acute. I am convinced that although in the first flush India will have a repetition, perhaps on a large scale, of the

wartime windfalls of 1939-45, in the ultimate analysis such gains will prove a bubble. This is the economic aspect, as I see it. On the moral plane, India's position will become indefensible. The next war will be an 'ideological' one, as they put it, to vanquish Communism. India has nothing against Communism, or I may add Capitalism, as such. It is the evils which have crept into the former in certain countries, and which flow from the latter in every social order, which we have to guard against. We cannot ally ourselves in arms with any who are out for destruction. Non-belligerency in the last resort, and every effort to remain on terms of friendship and understanding with all is the only honourable course for us.

## NOTES

- 1 Quoted in *Britain and Muslim India* (p 182) by K K Aziz, Heinemann, London, 1963
- 2 During reply to a debate on planning in the Lok Sabha, on 11th December 1963
- 3 Jawaharlal Nehru had said in 1944, in *The Discovery of India* (p 66) "We wanted no change of masters from white to brown, but a real people's rule, by the people and for the people, and an ending of our poverty and misery "

## 12. Last and Lonely Years

When Asaf Ali became Governor of Orissa in June 1948, the office still carried dignity. Among the early post-independence Governors were persons of such stature in public life as C. Rajagopalachari (West Bengal) and Sarojini Naidu (United Provinces). It was later that Governors began to be employed as hatchet men and women of the Prime Minister for the time being in power in Delhi, to remove from office inconvenient State governments (of another political party) or Chief Ministers (of one's own party). The choice of Governors came to be increasingly from the ranks of retired officers of the civil, Defence and police (specially intelligence) services, who while in service had proved their 'commitment' to the political party and the Prime Minister in power. Article 356 of the Constitution, which provides for the proclamation of President's rule (through the Governor) is based on a corresponding section of the Government of India Act of 1935, and has been blatantly misused over the post-independence decades.

The non-elective office of Governor of a State and even the elective office of President of the Indian Union came to be perceived by the public soon after independence as little more than ornamental posts since real power was in the hands of the Prime Minister in Delhi and the Chief Ministers in the State Capitals. The old pomp and splendour were retained by the new occupants of the Viceroy's mansion on Raisina Hill in Delhi (now known as Rashtrapati Bhavan) and of the Governor's palaces (now Raj Bhavans) in the provincial capitals. Jawaharlal Nehru had suggested to his friend Lord Mountbatten that the latter might, after the transfer of power when he would become the head of state of a self-governing Indian Dominion, move out of Raisina Hill and utilise the Commander-in-Chief's House. (This is known as Teen Murti because of the figures of three Indian flunkies of the colonial period which continue to disfigure the approach to it.) Instead, the Mountbattens continued to inhabit the viceregal mansion and, after them, so did the first 'Gandhian' President of India, Rajendra Prasad and his successors. Jawaharlal Nehru himself as Prime Mini-

ster moved into the Teen Murti House with its vast and wooded grounds which he had earlier thought would be appropriate for the Head of the Indian State. In the provincial capitals, Congress Governors moved into the palaces of the old British Governors--at more than one place within a province, for residence in summer and winter--as at Cuttack and Puri (on the sea) in Orissa. When Kailash Nath Katju was transferred from Orissa to West Bengal, Asaf Ali became the new tenant of the two mansions.

The ambassadorship to Washington had been a challenging assignment. It commenced before partition, till the actual occurrence of which Asaf Ali tried to put a brave face on the tragic turn of Hindu-Muslim relations in India. The assignment continued for six months and more after independence. Asaf Ali tried now to lay the foundations for extensive economic collaboration between the world's two largest democracies. But it was not to attain the dimensions he envisaged, thanks to the politics of the Cold War which made the U.S.A. take Pakistan in its embrace, the maladroit handling of the Kashmir problem which made India turn to the Soviet Union for support,<sup>1</sup> and Jawaharlal Nehru's penchant for State-controlled economic development.

After returning to India, Asaf Ali could have resumed the practice of law or chosen to teach--at, say, Jamia Millia. This would have afforded him the leisure for creative writing promotive of humane values, as well as freedom to express his views on issues of public policy. Alternatively, he could have re-entered the Constituent Assembly in which it was originally intended by the Congress party that he should take an active part. Asaf Ali was a member of a committee of experts appointed by the Congress with Jawaharlal Nehru as chairman to deal with matters concerning the Constituent Assembly. The other members were K.M. Munshi, N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, K.T. Shah, K. Santhanam, Humayun Kabir and D.R. Gadgil. Though Asaf Ali attended a week-end meeting of this group on the 20th and 21st July 1946, he had soon to revisit Kashmir for the legal defence of Sheikh Abdullah. Then followed Asaf Ali's induction into the Interim Government as Transport and Railways Minister. His appointment as India's first envoy abroad was decided by the time the Constituent Assembly held its first meeting on 9th December 1946.

Had Asaf Ali re-entered the Constituent Assembly, it is conceivable that he might have helped to give concrete shape to his vision of an Indian society as largely self-governing as possible at local level and with the least necessary intervention by remote authorities. The manifesto of the Congress for the 1945 elections to the Central Legislative Assembly had called for a federal constitution with a great deal of autonomy for the units. The manifesto for the elections to the provincial legislatures said specifically: "The federation of India must be a willing union of its various parts. In order to give the maximum of freedom to the constituent units, there may be a minimum list of common and essential federal subjects which will apply to all units, and a further optional list of common subjects which may be accepted by such units as desire to do so." But

the Constitution finalised by the Constituent Assembly towards the close of 1949 made the Centre extremely strong, with a long list of Concurrent subjects in respect of which Central laws would prevail over those of the States in the event of divergence. True, the situation had changed since the 1945-46 elections, with partition and the creation of Pakistan. But diminished India was no less diverse--ethnically, linguistically and in other respects--than undivided India had been. It is being increasingly realised that many of the strains that have afflicted the Indian polity in recent decades are due to excessive centralisation of power and responsibility at the expense of the States. Autonomy (often of a wrong kind that allowed misuse of power) has been granted to certain States, beginning with Jammu & Kashmir, to fend off secession or insurrection, and not as a normal condition for the healthy functioning of a large and diverse polity.

The Fundamental Rights are another area in which Asaf Ali's participation in constitution-making might have made a difference. Jawaharlal Nehru had no head for, or heart in, details. In the Constituent Assembly he concerned himself primarily with the Objectives Resolution which was to form the core of the Chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy--toothless because they are not justiciable. Nehru went unthinkingly along with certain provisions in the Constitution which have encouraged the emergence of theocratic sub-states within a supposedly secular State. Religious minorities have been granted the fundamental right to establish and administer educational institutions in which instruction may be imparted in one religion only, with the patent danger of promoting fanaticism, while religious instruction is outlawed from State-run schools.

To turn, from this exercise in speculation about what might have been, to what actually happened, Asaf Ali like the other ageing and tired leaders of the Congress chose the soft option. He accepted the governorship of Orissa that Jawaharlal Nehru offered him.

Each of the non-V.I.P. options open to Asaf Ali on his return from the Washington assignment would have entailed the acceptance of a simple life style. By this time he had no property left, having decided to sell off the Kucha Chelan house: the proceeds were to be applied among other things to sustaining the arrangement he had made with his bank for a sum of Rs.500 to be credited into Aruna's account every month, irrespective of where the two of them were.

Asaf Ali did not flinch from the rigours of prison life as a concomitant, whenever required, of the struggle for freedom. But in normal times he liked good food and drink, to dress well, and to entertain and be entertained. This entailed substantial expense. Asaf Ali restricted himself, as Aruna recalls, to two helpings of an alcoholic drink (after sundown and before dinner) since otherwise, as he would say, it would 'rouse the beast'. In contrast to his restraint in the matter of drinking, Asaf Ali was a chain smoker.

## **In Orissa**

The exterior and the interior landscape of Asaf Ali's life during 1948-52, when he was Governor of Orissa, are illumined by the following extracts from some of his correspondence. Kailash Nath Katju, who was to take over in West Bengal from C. Rajagopalachari, writes to Asaf Ali on 8th June 1948:

"I am happy to learn from Jawaharlal's telegram that you are coming over to Orissa. You are more fortunate than myself because you already know Mahatab so intimately. He is a fine man and his Cabinet works as a very harmonious team. I am sure you will like Orissa. The Oriyas are a very loveable people, sensitive, and proud of their past greatness, and eager to revive the ancient glories of their wonderful country.

"Jawahar has suggested that I should write to you about staff and other matters. The staff here is about the smallest in India...

"I presume Arunaji will come over with you and give me the pleasure of welcoming her here before I leave."

And on 9th June 1948, again from Katju to Asaf Ali:

"Formerly there used to be some difference between the salaries of different Governors. It ranged from Rs.120,000 a year to Rs.66,000 a year for the smaller provinces. But since the 15th of August last, salaries of Governors have been brought down to the level of Rs.66,000 per annum, or Rs.5,500 per mensem (less income tax of course). In addition, the Governors are allowed entertainment allowance, which differs in the different provinces. The Orissa allowance is Rs.625 per mensem.

"The Governor has a got a Budget of his own which was not votable and is still not votable by the legislature. Under this Budget everything is provided for--the government secretarial staff as well as the household staff and all government servants, including the kitchen and table establishment. The Governor has to provide for his own personal consumption.

"The Government House is fully equipped with crockery, cutlery, linen, etc. You can easily entertain about fifty guests at dinner, and many more at tea. I imagine the Government House entertainment depends a lot upon the personal wishes of each Governor. It is of course desirable to meet as many people as possible."

The glitter and the bustle of his office notwithstanding, it was not long before Asaf Ali was seized by a sense of loneliness at Cuttack. There were few with whom he could converse freely and at depth on life and literature. Jawaharlal Nehru says in a letter of 24th November 1948: "I met Aruna the other day and she was speaking to me about you and how lonely you were feeling. There you are in Orissa, feeling lonely and wanting the busy life of a big city and friends and companions. Here am I living in the big city meeting plenty of people, and longing for some place where I could be alone. I suppose both of these aspects of life are necessary, and too much of one is not too good.

Anyhow we have to submit to the force of circumstances or fate, or call it what you will...Thank you for the telegram you sent on the occasion of my birthday. At our age birthdays are not very happy events. We begin thinking of the past and grow reminiscent. A panorama of the past events come before our eyes: some pictures please, some do not."

Asaf Ali's letters to Jawaharlal Nehru give expression alternately to interest in public affairs, and in particular the development of Orissa's abundant natural resources, and to his own unhappy condition. He writes to Nehru on 26th November 1948:

I have been touring since the 15th, and just now I have finished the tour of one of our most fascinating districts, which is more than a thousand square miles in area and full of natural wealth in forests, minerals and hydro-electric potential. The Duduma Fall, which is now being harnessed to hydel, is the second biggest in the whole of India. How I wish you were here to see all this.

When I stood watching the Fall, great visions of the future rose before my eyes, which perhaps will not be realised during my lifetime but which are bound to come to reality in 15 to 20 years. The marvellous part of it all is that the whole of this area is the private property of the Maharaja of Jeypore. He is the biggest Zamindar in our province, with a gross income of more than Rs.20 lakhs, of which the Government gets some two to three lakhs as income tax and a *peshkash* of about Rs. 18,000...

After a visit to Konarak, I would like you to go to Barkul, an inland port of our Chilka Lake which is the largest lake in India. It is a very attractive spot, a visit to which I have reserved for going with you. From there I would like to bring you to Koraput and show you something of our submontane scenery.

The pain of loneliness was compounded by Asaf Ali's aversion to the politics of intrigue and power seeking. He says in a letter of 31st October 1949 to Hare Krishna Mahatab, the Congress Chief Minister of Orissa:

From the scraps of private information I have recently had, it appears that certain members of the Provincial Congress Committee, including office-bearers, have persuaded themselves to think that the Governor is "interfering with the administration a little too much". Further, a rumour has been in circulation for some weeks that the Governor and the Premier have been at loggerheads, and that tension is developing. Of course nothing could be more absurd or unfounded...I am wondering whether I should not drop all routine interviews with Secretaries and Directors, and confine my discussions to personal talks with you. As a friend, I would be most grateful to you for telling me the true feeling of the people of the Province, as you know it. And it will not take me a split second to take the necessary steps to transfer myself to some other sphere of activity.



This was followed by an offer of resignation, in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru on 21st December 1949:

You may recall that I was beginning to question my usefulness in my present capacity some months ago. After much thought I have come to the conclusion that for the remaining years of active life I must occupy myself in some other field. Perhaps a life far removed from politics and administration will suit me best. My personal needs are few and I mean to reduce them to the minimum. If there is something at some place (outside India) where I can be useful, well and good. Otherwise I must fend for myself like a common man, as I used to do for the best years of my life. I would, therefore, request you to relieve me as soon as it may be convenient for you. I enclose my official resignation addressed to the Governor General and leave it to you to forward it to Rajaji.

But if Asaf Ali was ill at ease, his friend Jawaharlal Nehru was confronted increasingly with problems in public life bearing on his own career as Prime Minister. Nehru writes to Asaf Ali on 19th August 1950: "I was not quite sure myself if you would care to go to Ankara. I would have preferred another place. But there is no immediate chance of a change in those other places...The fact of the matter is that I am totally unfit to advise anybody at present. I can hardly advise myself and the future is very uncertain. The Congress presidential election itself is going to be a turning point in many things. It may even affect my own activities in the future. So you see I can hardly advise you." Jawaharlal Nehru was referring to the impending contest between a critic of his, Purushottamdas Tandon, and his own candidate J.B. Kripalani for presidentship of the Congress. In September 1950, Tandon defeated Kripalani. However, exactly a year later Nehru forced Tandon to resign--and was himself elected Congress President.

With the first general elections in India on the basis of adult franchise approaching, Asaf Ali was dismayed by the kind of persons who were seeking office and power. He writes to Nehru on 30th November 1951:

What a dizzying experience you must be having these days. I can well imagine how you must have felt about the unplumbed depths of human nature while the selection of candidates for parliament and local legislatures was in progress. Imagine the type of people who come forward as candidates for moulding India's destiny. Heaven help us. For well nigh 25 years of electioneering I did have some foretaste of it; but this time it seems to have worked up to the climacteric. The hot overflow from the cauldron is now spreading all over the country. Of course it will subside once the electoral wave has spent its fury, but I shudder to think of the aftermath... Deshbandhu's tragic end in an air crash came as a personal blow. He was to me more than a political colleague for thirty years. In his last letter, which came a few days before his death, he asked me to intervene on his

behalf in regard to the selection of candidates for Delhi's legislature. My reply to him was half finished when the news of his death came. And poor Lajpat Rai, whom I had engaged as my Personal Assistant during the I.N.A. days and later drafted into the Party's office, had also sent me a telegram requesting me to recommend to you his candidature for parliament from Bhopal. It was an awful shock to me to learn that young and promising lives were cut down so unexpectedly.

Asaf Ali alerted Sardar Patel, Home Minister who was also in charge of affairs concerning the princely states (other than Jammu & Kashmir) about the move for a union of Eastern States. It was initiated by the Raja of Seraikella and supported by the ruler of Kalahandi. The Home Ministry impressed on the princelings that the merger of their domains with Orissa was final.

On another occasion Asaf Ali protested against what seemed to him an attempt by officials of the Union Home Ministry to meddle in educational policy. Rajmohan Gandhi says in his biography of Rajaji: "If his officials made a slip in good faith, C.R.'s umbrella shielded them. In a thoughtless letter sent to all chief secretaries (of States), home secretary H.V.R. Iyengar had drawn attention to certain suggestions (emanating from a conference of Central and State intelligence officials, held when Patel was Home Minister) for countering subversion in schools and colleges. Seeing the suggestions, some of which were naive and illiberal, Asaf Ali, Governor of Orissa, protested both to C.R. and to Nehru: 'Was', asked Asaf Ali, 'the intelligence bureau going to decide education policies?' Jawaharlal said to C.R. that he was 'greatly disturbed'. It was a communication of which C.R. had had no knowledge, and, as he told Asaf Ali, with a copy to Nehru, there was nothing wrong in the Government being informed of what the intelligence officials had proposed, 'whatever we may think of the suggestions themselves.'

Asaf Ali also conveyed to New Delhi his view of the role of a Governor, as more than a ceremonial head of state. Asaf Ali wrote: "Dr. Ambedkar says that the Governors are bound to accept the advice of the Council of Ministers. He has said that the position of Governors is analogous to that of the British Crown. Even so, we cannot overlook the points of difference. The British king is in no case expected to take over the administration of the government, whereas the President of the Indian Union is expected to do so. In case of a breakdown in a State, the Governor will have to administer the State with the help of Advisers. Hence he must keep himself in touch with the 'limbs of the administration' through interviews with Secretaries, etc."

At the annual conference of Governors in 1950, Asaf Ali had proposed that Governors should be made eligible for leave with pay, and a pension. On 15th April 1951, M.S. Aney writes to Asaf Ali from Government House, Patna, recalling how he had remarked on that occasion, 'You seem to be considerably pulled down', and expressing his gratification at President Rajendra Prasad's sanction of three months' leave for Asaf Ali. Referring to the proposal made

by Asaf Ali, Aney says: "The practical wisdom of that suggestion was not then properly appreciated and the matter was summarily brushed aside. But I believe that the question will have to be seriously considered by the President some time or other hereafter."

Asaf Ali went to Europe during the leave that was granted to him. He was in England from 19th May 1951 to 11th June, but a week during that time was spent in the Hospital for Tropical Diseases. He was able, however, to renew his acquaintance with the Mountbattens. On 22nd May 1951, signing herself 'Edwina Mountbatten of Burma', the former vicereine writes to Asaf Ali from her London home: "We have heard from Panditji that you have arrived in England, but are so sorry to learn from India House that you are not well and have had to go to hospital for treatment. We hope so much to see you as soon as you are better, and perhaps you will ask your Secretary to get in touch with me here so that we may arrange a meeting." And on 7th June 1951 'Mountbatten of Burma' writes: "It was such a pleasure seeing you again the other day, and I enjoyed the very interesting talk which we were able to have. I hope your health is fully restored."

Among the countries Asaf Ali visited on the European continent was Turkey, where he placed a wreath on Ataturk's tomb in Ankara. Asaf Ali returned in July to India and to Cuttack, from where he gives, in the course of a letter to a British friend<sup>2</sup> who had served in Orissa and was now living in Devon, a picture of free India in transition from economic stagnation to development: "As your interest in the State is as keen I expect as ever, I may inform you that at the moment we are trying to cope with an unprecedented job of work in making preparations for nearly 7.6 million adults to go to the polls...I wish you would find it possible to visit Orissa some time early next year to judge for yourself what has been done in spite of heavy odds in the shape of inexperienced personnel and paucity of funds. Several factories have come up, the most important of which is the textile factory at Chowdwar. The Hirakud hydro-electric project has made sufficient progress to hope that in another two or three years' time the Sambalpur district will have made a good beginning in several directions. The same can be said about the Duduma (or Machkund) hydro-electric project. Several bridges have been constructed, of which the ones over the Katjuri, the Kuakhai and the Daya have connected the two parts of the Province for all-weather traffic. The merger of the 24 Eastern States posed a number of difficult administrative questions in the beginning, but now the integrated Orissa has become an established fact. Of many changes of policy, by far the most far-reaching in my opinion is the recent decision of the Government to abolish Zamindari. The Bill was passed by the legislature a week ago...If you came here now to Puri, you would find the Government House in a transitional state. I have caused a few changes to be made, primarily to preserve the structure against the destructive effect of saline breeze. The seaside front has been plastered and colour washed (ivory-white), with the shutters and

louvres painted sea- green. The suggestion came two years ago from the Prime Minister and Lady Mountbatten...I have also had a deep casuarina screen planted in front of the beachside railings to prevent the sand drift, and in two years the whole length of the beach side compound has become a lovely sight."

The suggestion for improving the Government House had been made by Prime Minister Nehru and Lady Mountbatten during a visit to India by the former vicereine in 1949. While planning the trip, Nehru wrote to her on 5th December 1948: "The visit to Bombay might include Ajanta and Ellora. The Konark temple in Orissa stands by itself and would require a special visit if you care to go there. I might inform you that Asaf Ali has written to me to convey his invitation to you to Orissa and has drawn up something like a week's programme for you in his province. I am afraid that is not possible. But it would be worthwhile to go to Konark and if you go there, I should like to accompany you as I have not seen the place. I should also like to go to Ajanta and Ellora. But I am not sure if I shall be able to manage it. A Prime Minister must not go sight-seeing too much. As you have yourself suggested, you might stay at Government House (in New Delhi) to begin with. Later the Prime Minister will be honoured if you choose to be his guest."

Konarak is noted for its magnificent sculpture, much of which is erotic. Asaf Ali was free both of prudery and prurience. He wrote in 1944 in his autobiographical notes, about the celebrated case (in 1913) of Madame Villany who had performed a dance on the stage in Paris in the nude, and been fined for the offence:

Paris was agog with Madame Villany's case. She was a dancer who declared that dance was an expression of the human soul, and clothes were an impediment in the way of an artist's self- expression. The body was a work of divine art, and its ecstasy expressed in dance was hampered and distorted by sartorial entanglements. Consistently with her views, she had given a nude performance before a select gathering in Paris, and had been hauled up for obscenity and fined--lightly. The controversy which arose out of this was an event in artistic circles. She was prepared to be judged by Rodin, the great sculptor, for he alone could deliver a worthy verdict--the rest was philistinism.

It was a revival of Salome, in effect. The judge who fined Villany represented the Calibans who saw the reflection of their hideous souls in Villany's mirror. In our talks, I was all for Villany and would have stripped her even of the fig-leaf which she was believed to have worn, for wasn't golden hyacinth nature's own decoration which enhanced beauty in a dance symphony? I was advanced for my age, and I fear I am so even now, for human beings cannot yet bear to see themselves as they are. They must wrap themselves in fiction and morals, degrade sex to filthy sin, and resist every attempt of art to lift them out of the dunghill of bestiality.

Almost a decade later, in the early 1950's Asaf Ali writes about the sculptured figures locked in passionate embrace at Konarak:

At a time and in an age when the adoration of the principle of creation was not masked by mystified make-believe, a frank discussion of divine creativity could not have been dreamt of as a matter of estoeric exposition only. It was a matter for everyone's intimate knowledge, and to leave it to meretricious curiosity and socially guarded ignorance might have been considered both dangerous and an insincere denial of an inescapable reality. It is also possible that a thousand years of Buddhist monasticism had left behind in Orissa strong trends of sterile celibacy and cloistral abuses in its degenerate phase. An open portrayal of the legitimate and its opposite in life might have been conceived as an educative remedy.

There is another comment on Konarak by Asaf Ali in the course of a letter of 27th August 1951 to Sardar K.M. Panikkar, India's ambassador to the People's Republic of China:

My postscript to the monograph on Konarak was conceived after I had lighted upon some literature which contained the clue. The abandonment of Konarak Temple, ordered by a puritan Raja, is believed to have been dictated by his repudiation of the Tantric cult.

Moreover, regarding what may be considered as erotic representations in sculpture or in painting, the explanation of some of the leading Mahants of the day is that they were intended to test the faith of the devotees. One finds such representations inside the Jagannath temple which is a living church today. They are also to be found in Benaras and elsewhere in certain temples. I send herewith a copy of the monograph in which Rajendra Lal Mitra has offered his own explanation or rather an apologia in the spirit of a shocked Victorian. I agree with you that the history of Orissa is yet to be written. In fact, the history of most parts of our country has yet to be reconstructed from such fragments as may be available...

How I envy your privilege to watch the giant baby grow under your very eyes. The West has reason to feel unnerved.

Asaf Ali's letters to his friend Hosain Alikhan of Hyderabad reflect the loneliness of his life at Cuttack, with Aruna paying only occasional visits. Shortly after Syud Hosain, their dear common friend from student days in England, died of a massive heart attack when he was India's ambassador in Egypt, Asaf Ali writes to Hosain Alikhan on 9th March 1949: "He lived and died like a prince which he was, and how enviably! Sarojini too breathed her last the same way five days after. It is obviously my turn next."

In a letter to this writer, Asaf Alikhan (son of Hosain Alikhan and Asaf Ali's godson) recalls: "The last holiday my father spent with Asaf Sab was in Orissa in January 1951. On 22nd January Asaf Sab wrote to my mother to say he wished she had accompanied her husband; that the get-together with my

father was an unimaginable delight; how they spent the days in intellectual harmony and companionship as if it was a time in heaven; that while my father was preparing to leave, he was overcome by gloomy thoughts of the loneliness that would descend on him; however, if one lived, maybe there would be another opportunity and she, and the children too, would come. Sadly, that was not to be.

"On 12th August 1951 Asaf Sab, on return from his holiday abroad, wrote to congratulate my parents, my wife and me on the arrival of our first child--a son--on 3rd August. He said he was very happy to know of this as my father's close friend and brother, and as my godfather. He then suggested several names for the child.

"Asaf Sab said that during his visit abroad he had been to Paris, Istanbul, Ankara and Cairo: 'I was in Cairo for only about 36 hours. I visited Syud's burial place and was terribly upset. Owing to bureaucratic thick-headedness, there was no tomb or even a headstone to mark the spot--only some dry wreaths of last year, placed there by Jawahar. I have spoken to Jawahar and Maulana, and I expect something will be done soon'."

## Humanists Divided by Ideology

As an excellent communicator himself, Asaf Ali knew that effective communication can take place even if it be in halting speech (as by Gandhiji in Hindi) by a person standing face-to-face before the audience. To hear someone on the radio or off a gramophone record is not the same thing as to see and hear him or her in person. Yet Asaf Ali would naively ask Aruna, such was the extremity of his need for her company, why she had to keep travelling around the country to address meetings: could she not record her speeches and have them played?

It has been said that a poet writes wiser than he knows. The remarks of the Sun and of his spouse, reproduced below from Asaf Ali's play *Sanjna* (Evening Twilight), are like a prevision of the kind of argument that was to take place between Asaf Ali and Aruna:

*The Sun*: "It is a delusion to imagine that anyone is master of oneself in this Universe. If I delayed my daily duty by even a fraction of a wink, the entire organisation of my realm would be thrown into confusion...I admit I was rash, and perhaps selfish, to rush into the sacred commitment of personal love--with all the load of cares and responsibilities imposed on me by the impersonal love inherent in my creation.

*Sanjna* (to herself): Why did he not think of all this when he employed the good offices of the seven sages to entrap me?...We are like two streams running parallel, two polite strangers...I look upon him as a 'ired traveller come here for a night's rest, an honoured guest whose convenience has to be carefully studied and observed, and we don't come off our ceremonious behaviour.

*The Sun* (continuing): "I know how you must be feeling, and I feel it no less keenly And yet it is beyond my power to annul or alter the decrees of Heaven. The duty that is laid upon me shall not be denied. I only hope that you, who are the very soul of nobility, will invigorate me with your moral support in the pursuit of the law of my being--my Dharma... The strains of my songs radiate from morning to dusk, waking the sleeping world to life, invigorating the weak, healing the sick, exposing the evil...Each animate or inanimate being is born to fulfil the law of its or his being. The law of my being demands that I should help all of them to flower to the utmost of their capacity."

Thus were two humanists divided by the Marxist ideology that Aruna was drawn towards during her underground years, and with which she identified herself over the years after 1946 when she emerged overground. Her visit to the Soviet Union in 1950 sealed this identification with what seemed to her to be the first workers' State in the world and therefore like an approximation to the Kingdom of God on earth. True, she was too sensible to be taken in by the distorted picture of India as perceived by Soviet, British and Indian Communists. They asserted that Gandhiji was a reactionary and an agent of landlords and capitalists, and that Jawaharlal Nehru was a stooge of Anglo- American imperialism. In her later years she would wonder who misled whom: did the Indian Communists mislead their British and Soviet comrades, or did Soviet theoreticians mislead their British and Indian disciples? In any case, when she could no longer stand this offensive twaddle, Aruna Asaf Ali requested Comrade Ajoy Ghosh, then secretary of the Communist Party of India to whose Central Committee she had been elected, to let her leave the party. But her faith in the Soviet Union remained unshaken for thirty-five years till the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev as Secretary-General of the CPSU (B). His inauguration of Perestroika and Glasnost opened her eyes, like those of millions the world over, to the truth about Stalinism.

There was one respect in which Asaf Ali was taken in as much as his wife was by the claims of the Soviet leaders and of the admirers and friends of the U.S.S.R. the world over. This was the boast that the Bolshevik revolution had solved the problem of nationalities by offering the right of self-determination, to the point of freedom to secede from the U.S.S.R., to the numerous non-Russian ethnic groups in the Czarist empire. Commenting on Jawaharlal Nehru's attribution (in the manuscript of *The Discovery of India*) of the heroic defensive effort of the Soviet Union to the revival of appeals to Russian nationalism by the Soviet rulers, Asaf Ali said: "I don't entirely agree with this reading. Soviet Russia may have played upon the national chord for fleeting purposes. But think of the number of nationalities they have brought into the field. Surely the Kazak and Tajik, and the Turkoman, could never respond to Russian nationalism. He could respond but to the Soviet and Socialist ideal, or he would be a mercenary. Despite all that has been said about the revival of nationalism in Russia, I don't

see how it could work among non-Russian groups except by appealing to some deeper and wider sentiment." It was only after the iron lid of Stalinist dictatorship exercised through the CPSU (B) was finally lifted in 1991 that the vaunted multi-national edifice came crashing down and the Soviet Union was revealed to have been as much a prison-house of nationalities as the Czarist empire had been.

Asaf Ali's deep concern for Aruna, and his sympathetic understanding of her as a prisoner of ideology, are expressed movingly in a series of letters that he wrote to her from Orissa. Following are some extracts.

*24th July 1949.* While I can well appreciate your inclination for renunciation, bodily health is also a factor of consequence.

My being companionless is a minor matter--in any case, I am on the way out. But it hurts me somewhere deep down in the invisible part of my being to hear you say that you are 'homeless'. In the larger sense none is homeless in this vast universe, and yet everyone is homeless, if a home means a permanent location. Understanding and companionship are the only homes one may value.

You have carried 'the age of inquiry'--usually between 16 and 25 or so--till a much later age. By all means read Marx, and whatever else you think will give you a deeper insight into the workings of the human mind in relation to the material world. But in the end you will find that theories must proceed from a study of facts, and the facts of Indian life are frightfully complex. I have started farming, and all the theoretical Grow More Food models, which I had mathematically fixed up perfectly, have had to be banished...

I have read some of the articles by 'Super'.<sup>3</sup> They reveal a vast field of book study. But before he goes much further I would like him to forget his history of revolutions etc. He should get down to the actualities governing cultivation before he writes about Grow More Food...Whether we want to intensify cultivation by double or triple crops, or extend cultivation by reclamation of land, the investment required is enormous. With free land and water, it will cost me Rs.2000 to cultivate the five acres (supervision free, expert advice free, modern methods readily available), and in the end I should be lucky if I am reimbursed and can start the next year's operation...I have said all this to impress on you and Super, and all the Supers with theories of revolution, to look at facts. The very process of living with and organising peasants will bring home to every revolutionary the true facts of life and therefrom the remedies of the social and economic diseases about which philosophers theorise. The trouble is that most people want to read and write--even if by the hard way of life--in their self-appointed corners. This is what Marx did, and he was corrected by Lenin, and the latter has been corrected by Stalin, and Stalin will be corrected by his successors.



Let Super start a farm, and let him in spare moments write from his own personal experience of a farmer's life. India is a colossal farmland with varying conditions. They have to be studied on the spot. Theories make excellent reading and provide a pastime, too. But the moment you launch your barque, it is the billowy sea that decides the issues of the mariners. *26th July 1949*. You could have kept Mahabharat. I did want you to read just the Shanti Parv--which is a fine summary of all the Hindu schools of philosophy. You are just now going through the Sankhya stage of thought, which concerns itself with materialism--excluding from its purview the Infinite and Eternal motive power. In most cases of intelligent questers, the human mind passes through seven stages:

- (i) Mind gathering: learning the alphabet of the material world around, with wonder, curiosity and joy or at times pain, physical or mental (early life up to, say, 15).
- (ii) Thought-gathering: repeating thought-pictures in words, without understanding the full import (between 15 & 18): imitative religion.
- (iii) Discovering elementary contradictions through the grammar of thought, and repudiating whole systems of thought as a result (between 18 and any age): atheism, indifference to religion or agnosticism). This is the stage of conscious inquiry, revolt, and search for a satisfying system of thought.
- (iv) Crystallisation of first conclusions, and either laissez- faire in life, or an active pursuit of certain ideals (any age).
- (v) Discovery of the harder realities, and confession of human limitations (any age).
- (vi) Recognition of the non-material super-reality, and personal humility (any age).
- (vii) Pursuit of ideals or higher aspirations consistent with human limitations (any age).

There is nothing rigid about the division. These stages may overlap or get mixed up. Hindus in India, and all other people elsewhere according to their environment or mental maturity, have followed this course.

In ancient India, from the Vedic period of poetic lispings about the wonders of life, to the Upanishadic period of deeper musings, only the first three stages mentioned above were covered. Then started the Darshanik period of philosophical inquiry, at the foundation of which stands the old system of Kapila's Sankhya. Believe me, it is nearly as materialistic as Marx's historical materialism. Being purely materialistic, it allowed no supernatural agency to intervene. Kapila's Sankhya aimed at *action*, the undeniable constant of the material universe. It was followed by the neo-Sankhya, i.e. Nyaya, which added *knowledge* to its aim. (Just think of your mind's evolution. It was action from 1942 onwards, and now it is knowledge. Overlook the overlappings. The main stress is what matters.)

Then came the higher urge: for both pure action and pure knowledge would prove sterile, and would become boring unless joined to some purpose. The final purpose being beyond the reach of logic, the next system of thought, Vaiseshika, added the knowledge of the Creator.

This again proved unsatisfactory, and Patanjali propounded his theory of Yoga or Union with the Ultimate Reality, the Creator-beyond-the-material-world, by disciplined functioning of body and thought.

Finally came the crowning system of thought, Vedanta, expounded by Vyasa. It envisaged all visible and invisible contents of the universe as facets of the same Reality, and aimed at knowledge through disciplined thought for purposive action through disciplined body. Gandhi believed in this school of thought, and aimed at resolving the contradictions of the material world by curing the excesses (violence in thought, word and deed) through their negation, non-violence.

This is all too bald and fragmentary. But as a bare outline of the evolutionary process of human thought, it is as good as a compendium.

You are bound to be fascinated by the Marxian analysis of materialism. There is a very great deal in it that is of permanent value. I wonder whether you remember that we had Bukharin's 'Historical Materialism' among our books. I could not read it through, page after page, for I found it full of tendentious distortion of certain scientific facts. Julian Huxley is finding today that sciences are becoming handmaidens of the Party's theories in Russia. This I consider dishonest. Facts should not be fitted into theories. Theories should arise out of facts, and rejected if found at variance with facts. Today Russian astronomy is rejecting Relativity, for instance, for it does not fit into the Communist theory. There are some predictions in Marxian materialism which events have contradicted since. Marx's proletarian revolution was envisaged as the natural outcome of a class-conscious proletariat in a highly industrialised country like Germany. (His whole study was based on facts observed in Germany, France and England.) But history moved in a different direction altogether, and the great revolution broke out, and has consolidated itself, in Russia--a predominantly agricultural country. And China has followed...

*7th December 1950.* Enclosed is a cutting which will interest you. It is probably one of your party men. They have no training beyond parrot-crying of party slogans. What many such fellows-- and you will collect an army of them--need is a course in the kindergarten class to learn the use of their own organs of sense and hands and feet rather than mouth big words like socialism, communism, marxism, etc. However, there may be exceptions.

You have chosen the harder experiment with life, for a great cause. The cause is worthy but a premature long-jump to short-circuit the natural processes of the human mind (en masse) may not prove effective...

I feel as you do, but I do what I know I can. It is small: but which atom of a human being can change the face of this earth, and the destiny of the human race, except as a cog in the great wheel of creation?

Logic and the processes of reasoning can serve any emotion. Masked emotions go masquerading as logical reasoning. And each claims infallibility for his way of thinking--the revelationists, the materialists, the stagnant reactionary, the too dynamic revolutionary, not to mention a host of others.

If you are a determinist, no amount of shouting by you can change Nature's time-table. But if you are a libertarian and believe in the potency of human will, you need not shout, but can regulate the course of events by *human* devices. We have to rise above the jungle law and exercise our intelligence to find a human way of managing change. The consummation aimed at can and should be brought about not by clash but by union of classes. This means the enforcement of restraint, and the redistribution of the common heritage on an equitable basis. It must eventually become a basis of equality, and service of the race will be the higher reward of the deserving. 'Bog of ideas', you may say. This is deviationism, the rigid Marxist will say. Our fore-runners believed (and most people do so today) in the Vedas, the Bible, the Qoran, Galileo, Newton and the like with equal conviction and fanaticism. That is why even Stalin has condemned dogmatism, and Kalinin's addresses are full of the same theme. The parrot-cry of Marxism is of the same texture as the faith of religionists and the reason of a type of rationalist.

Let us pause and think for ourselves. Is there no way to rise above the law of the jungle? There is, and that is why the successors of ape men have come to live together in millions without cutting one another's throats at all times of the day. The other kind of throat-cutting, i.e. the depriving of the lean masses of their due by the fattened minority can and should be controlled the same way, particularly when collective action by the adult masses has been made possible through a peaceful, democratic process. The idea cannot be rejected out of hand except by fanatics.

*9th December 1950.* Anyone promising relief of suffering will draw some crowd in the political field. But rationalism and superstition are antitheses. So long as the 'holy scriptures' remain the guiding formulae, humanity cannot develop the degree of individual and collective rationalism necessary for enlightened and peaceful progress. However, I suppose the atom bomb will settle most of the controversies. By the way, you may find in the Press tomorrow a statement on the outlawing of the atom bomb issued over the signatures of Orissa's legislators. You *may* appreciate it, and you may also guess its author.

*1st January 1951.* I got back on the 30th. It was a very strenuous tour--700 miles by car through dense forest, and about 500 miles by train. Very

interesting countryside, full of mineral wealth and fascinating landscape. Labour and mining problems are best understood in such areas, and also the meaning of the word *exploitation*. Nearly all the unskilled labour in factories and mines is subject to the exploitation of the recruiting contractors, who nibble away three to five annas in the rupee from their wages. The capitalist pays the minimum prescribed wage, but the contractor who recruits labour takes away 20%. It is here that the first bit of organised work has to be initiated, to secure to the labourer what is his due. Surplus value is invisible, but here the visible wage is being appropriated by the middleman. This is illustrative of the actual problems to be tackled. The overall 'revolution' is a far-away business. But, on the principle of first things first, much spade work is necessary. With all my experience, I am still learning the alphabet of reality.

I did a good bit of useful work during my tour, checking exploiters and telling off stupid and selfish officers, directing better amenities and wages, etc. You have said something about 'But for the grace of God there go I.' It is not the position or post which one occupies that shapes one's outlook. It is the personality of the incumbent which can invest the position with a certain distinction. And good and conscious work is possible in silk as well as Khaddar saris.

As you know I am far from wanting to discourage you. I am only pointing out the inadequacy of advanced methods in their application to a social order which in the bulk consists of primitive conditions of agriculture. In a sense I am satisfied that you are discovering India. What you put down to unawareness is the result of centuries and centuries of addiction to the opium of a false spirituality--the belief in Karma in its poisonous form of contentment with one's fate, and all the miasma of that sort. There are in our land classes within classes--the castes and sub-castes, and the snobbery of the so-called better-born over the low-born. A whole generation will have to be taught the equality of men as men, and respect for the so-called low professions. They will have to be taught much more: a rational and common sense outlook will have to be inculcated.

One swallow or even a hundred swallows like you will not make a summer. I am pained by your loneliness and homelessness and the obstinacy with which you are pursuing a course of life which cannot yield commensurate results. What you *can* do can be accomplished even from a 'home'. I do not know how to convince you against your instinctive obstinacy. The home is there for you at all times, and on your own terms. But you prefer homelessness and lonesomeness not merely at your but another's cost. How is one to persuade you to be normal and yet distinctly effective? I believe I have done and said everything worth saying and doing to evoke from you the normal thought processes. Perhaps the bare truth of the

situation will dawn on you too late--after my end.

**8th January 1951.** Your letter came in two days ago. Yes, I can imagine Saiyidain waxing eloquent on what he has termed my masterpieces. Hosain Alikhan, now staying with me is equally impressed, and is begging me to publish my recent (detention period) poems. No publisher can be found. And if I decide to publish them it will mean a dead loss of perhaps Rs.2000. He thinks it is worth it. But I feel that for an old man with hardly enough to retire on, Rs.2000 must be reserved.

Other works, too, are still in Ms., particularly some of the larger ones in Urdu--translations by courtesy, otherwise nearly as good as original. But who cares? In another 15 years, even the few who value this language will have disappeared. And so also the works under reference.

In this Universe, 'sacrifice' is the governing rule. There gapes before us the *havan kund* of the Time-Space continuum in which is alight the fire of innumerable galaxies. Animate and inanimate beings are hourly being offered as *ahuti*. All imperfections are thus being returned to their source for purification. So, why should an infinitesimal cell's functional evidence last longer than it is found useful?

Have I thought, taken long excursions in the realm of imagination and poetry, and otherwise performed other functions? No. The *Universal* I has found its own expression through the earthly instrument of my body and, having used the flute of this being will throw it into the sacrificial fire of the Eternal Flame. It has amused itself, and incidentally its instrument, and possibly others--such as Saiyidain and Hosain.

Please tell Shankar<sup>4</sup> that his Children's Number is really well got up and he deserves to be congratulated both on the idea and the execution of it. It is highly creditable.

**11th January 1951.** Hosain is very likely to want to return by the end of the month, although I shall try my best to hold him back. he has been such good company, stimulating my literary laziness. Only now have I discovered, while reading out some Ms. to him, how much of fairly valuable stuff is locked up in my black box-- though somewhat fragmentary.

I have got so used to being alone that even when I lie up in bed, I don't feel that I need company. And yet sometimes nostalgia for the vanished paradise overwhelms me.

**20th February 1951.** If they agree to grant me leave on even half pay, I shall think of sailing away early in May. If you can join me it will be lovely...One may work for a cause, but one may refresh oneself. One owes something to oneself no less than to the bedlamite family of mankind. I say bedlamite, because they are not frogs and yet they behave like frogs in every way-- hopping perversely out of the bucket of peace into any kind of frying pan and, spawning like frogs too, increasing the weedy growth

on this globe by geometrical progression. Who can save them but fate?

*3rd March 1951.* From a letter from Freda Bedi I learn that she found you thinner and looking older than you were when she saw you last. Also, she feels that there is an atmosphere of the convent about you, working, as you do, all by yourself. I do not know how I can be of any assistance to you, when you refuse every form of assistance. I feel inexpressibly sad, and helpless. However, it is no use my harping on the obvious.

I have read the cuttings you sent, and I also know from other sources that now you stand by yourself--a solitary sower in the immense desert of underdeveloped human minds. Even if one seed sprouts, true to type, it will suffice. I understand your mental frame. All luck to you...

There is just one germ in every heart which is always ready to respond to the gentlest stimulus--and it is love, pure and simple. "It never claims (if it is true), it surrenders; it suffers, but it never resents." (Gandhi). He has gone further and said: "It serves without a reward...and it is unjust (if ever) by accident." These are eternal truths. I may add: "And where it embraces mankind, it cannot be unjust to individuals even for the sake of the human race. It can allow hatred against none."

My mind is experiencing a great conflict. I am deeply conscious of the worthlessness of the current values for which mankind strives and struggles; and on the other, I find it hard to strip myself of all flesh, to the bone, to assert the joy of renunciation. The paths of easy life, and of repudiating the last vestige of 'possession', part at my feet. And I do not know which path to follow. Somehow even the latter path seems to point to the lure of vanity. Happiness in renouncement is as much of a bubble as the pursuit of fleshly pleasures. Is there a midway? It is perhaps the golden mean of the Greeks.

Referring to the printing for private circulation, of his 'Gossamer and Twilight' at the Government Press, Cuttack--at a cost of Rs.200 on his own personal account--and the Ms. he had completed of his reminiscences of the assignment as ambassador at Washington (which he hoped to publish, with a foreword by Prime Minister Nehru--a hope not realised in his time, his memoirs being printed for the first time in this work), Asaf Ali says in the course of the same letter to Aruna:

Sprung from the stark ruins of a crumbled social order and nurtured in the near-foxhole of Kucha Chelan slums, with no facilities of desirable early education, what did I have but some native intelligence and the character of my mother to go by? It was granted me to give whatever I was capable of to my country and to my people, and to measure myself in international society. That is all that insignificant beings like myself can hope to do. So long as a dew drop turns its face to the sun and even for a trice reflects it totally, it has fulfilled the purpose of its being...I am just thinking aloud

to soothe the bruises which life inflicts on all. It helps to carry on.

Some further insights into the life and thinking of Asaf Ali at Cuttack are provided by other correspondence of the period. In reply to an invitation from the Sri Aurobindo Abirbhava Mahotsava reception committee, headed by Dr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, to attend the function to be held at Calcutta for a week from 15th August 1951, or to send a message if he could not come, Asaf Ali writes on 6th August 1951:

From 1905 to 1908 I and many others of my generation fed voraciously on the gospel preached by Aravindo Ghosh, the prophet of Indian nationalism, in the *Bandemataram*. Later my leader, the late C.R. Das, reintroduced me to him as a poet who has translated Chittaranjan's Bengali poems under the title of 'songs of the sea'. Yet again, in 1922 when I lay incarcerated in a filthy prison in Mianwali (now in Pakistan), I read his philosophical works, and since then I tried to keep pace with his literary and philosophical writings. Paul Richard has paid glowing tribute to him as the coming Prophet of Asia.

Our younger generation will do well to study him to realise how much he has bequeathed to India, and perhaps through India to the world, of what is of supreme value in India's philosophical spirit. It is a heritage of which India has every reason to be proud.

In these days of breathless haste and impatient frustration all round, people find very little or no time to pause to read what may stimulate deeper thinking. Aravindo's thought will outlast this age of contempt for what is beyond the immediate

Deshbandhu Gupta writes to "My dear Asaf Bhai" on 8th August 1951, when the first general elections under the republican Constitution of India, on adult franchise, were in the offing: "Your name was being mentioned as successor to Mr. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. I hope this will materialise and we will have you back in Delhi. You must have read the press note issued by the Government regarding the future constitutional set-up of Part 'C' States including Delhi. We all feel so happy about it, and I take this opportunity to congratulate you as one who was the father of this idea. Your presence in Delhi will be a great source of strength to us, particularly on account of this development."

When there was a misunderstanding between the Governor and the Chief Minister with regard to the affairs of the University at Cuttack, President Rajendra Prasad tells Asaf Ali in the course of a letter that the Prime Minister would look into it during his forthcoming visit, and adds: "I can quite understand and appreciate your feeling, but you are too old a public man to have a thin skin." Rajendra Prasad suggests that Asaf Ali might carry on as Governor of Orissa till the elections that were due in the winter of 1951-52.

Sri Prakasa, at that time Governor of Madras, writes to Asaf Ali from Raj

Bhavan at Guindy on 13th May 1952: " I am very grateful to you for your kind and affectionate letter of 10th May. I was greatly touched by all that you have written. I admire your courage and fortitude. The philosophy of life that you have put in a few words in your letter is such as to give heart to anyone. Everybody has his Cross to carry despite outward appearances; and I know yours has been a heavy one. No one has ever heard you speaking ill of anyone; and you have a good word for even those who are unkind. I have seen this throughout our fairly close association of many decades; and I have always admired you for it specially because I am unable to emulate. I will say no more.

"Allow me to offer you my greetings, good wishes and felicitations on your 64th birthday. May there be many, many years of useful service before you. How old we are all getting! It is forty years back that I first met you at the entertainment that you had arranged for Mrs. Naidu and Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Webb in London. I am forgetting the name of the hotel--was it Criterion? We have all seen many things since then, good and bad, and it is some comfort to realise that we have kept together through it all...I can read your heart's sadness between all your lines. Alas, such is life. And others don't know, seeing only the outward trappings."

There had been an Urdu-Hindi controversy since the closing years of the 19th century arising from the objection raised by some Muslims to the permission granted by the government for use, in court documents, of Hindi in the Devanagari script, in addition to Urdu. But till the 1950's it was common for urban Hindus in northern India to study Urdu alongside their mother tongue. It was after the Muslim League brought about the dismemberment of India in the name of Islam that Urdu came to be regarded with disfavour by some Hindus as the language of Muslims. Among distinguished scholars of Urdu belonging to the older generation was Kailas Nath Katju. He and Asaf Ali would sometimes write to each other by hand in Urdu. In a letter of 9th April 1951 from Calcutta (in English, and typewritten), Katju says to Asaf Ali: "Your letter was a perfect gem and it caused me intense delight as a literary masterpiece. And to think that you just wrote it off-hand without a pause! What a flow of apt language and expressive words to give full play to varying emotions! Ever since I read the letters of Ghalib I have never had a similar sensation. In my college days the letters of Alamgir were prescribed in our course. Some of them were good but they were so formal.

"The art of letter writing is a God-given gift. Few possess it and I fear that in these days of storm and stress, hustle and bustle, few have time to cultivate that great art. A letter like yours is one of the most precious gifts that one can bestow on another. I wish you would make a collection of your letters and publish them. You must have written hundreds like the one that you sent me, to your numerous friends during the last thirty years. Have you preserved copies?"



## **Exile to an Earthly Paradise**

On 25th May 1952, Asaf Ali writes to a friend in Delhi about his appointment as India's ambassador to Switzerland: "Dear Ranbir, Yes, Switzerland is a fine country. And although it is like banishment to an earthly paradise, I really have no reason to complain of it." The posting to Berne was arranged by Jawaharlal Nehru in the hope that the climate would help to restore his friend's health.

The state of mind and feeling of Asaf Ali is brought out vividly in the recollections of a visit to him at Berne in January 1953 by Asaf Ali's godson. Asaf Alikhan says in the course of a note with which he sent his reminiscences of Asaf Ali to this writer: "We are four brothers and two of us were named after Shahid Suhrawardy and Asaf Ali, who were dear friends of my father. He had wonderful friends, and my mother said to us when we were small that it was her constant prayer that we too be as lucky as him.

"In a letter of 10th August 1950 to my father, Asaf Sab said he was delighted to hear that I was getting married (on 14th September 1950) and if he could manage it, it would give him great pleasure to come to Hyderabad on the occasion. But, he said, life was uncertain. If he could not make it, he wanted us to go to Orissa for a holiday after our wedding. On 26th August he wrote to father to say that he had received my letter the previous day along with my photograph and that of Fatima, my bride-to-be. He said: 'I am immensely happy to think that they are so well matched.' He also said that he had invited us to spend a part of the honeymoon with him in Orissa.

"Sadly, we could not manage a visit then, and he spoke to us both about this when we were staying with him at Berne in January 1953. I had written to him while on vacation in England in 1952, and he invited us over. We arrived there on 6th January 1953. Though we had planned to spend only a few days, he just would not permit us to leave so soon. After more than one postponement he insisted that we spend the Republic Day function with him, and finally we left Berne on 29th January.

"The Republic Day reception in the lovely house occupied by the Ambassador was memorable. Mr. Asaf Ali had insisted that it would not be a short evening reception with only soft drinks and snacks, and that dinner must be served. When he was told by the staff that the cost of this would far exceed the financial limits fixed by the Government, he told them that the excess would be paid by him personally--and so it was.

"Asaf Sab did everything he could to make our stay with him enjoyable. He would take us out to receptions at other embassies, and would introduce us as his son and daughter-in-law. One day he said he would like us to send our year-and-half old son Anvar, who was in the care of my parents-in-law during this vacation, and that he would arrange for a good governess to take care of him. When my wife said she would then have to be the governess, he ap-

preciated the comment and said he could understand her point that the little boy had to grow up with us. Asaf Sab was very fond of Western music and three or four times he took us out after dinner to the concert hall. One afternoon we went with him by the chair-car rope-rail to a hill top restaurant for coffee and ice cream.

"Narottam was the valet that Mr. Asaf Ali had brought with him from Orissa to Berne. He took great care of us, and said to us that one day when Asaf Sab saw us go out together for a walk, he remarked to Narottam how good that looked.

"We left Berne on 29th January after a truly wonderful holiday with a fond parent. It took me back many years and I remembered my visit to my godparents in Delhi in December 1936, when they had taken me out to the Qutab, to Connaught Place, and for ice cream at the Standard Restaurant; and the watch they had presented on the Id day. I recalled also the letter of introduction that Asaf Sab had sent me when he heard that I was going to Bombay in 1949 to look for a career opening there. He had insisted that I see the Governor of Bombay--Mr.Maharaj Singh--with this letter.

"On the P&O ship from Tilbury in February 1953 we got to know an elderly Australian couple. Mr. Giles was with the Australian Railways and Susan Giles was an extraordinary person--a palmist, faith healer and above all a good friend. She kept in touch with us right until she died about 18 years later. She had become very fond of my wife and would say how lovely Fatima looked and what pretty saris she wore. On the last day of the voyage she said she would like to see us in our cabin, and asked us to keep a pack of cards ready. We could not figure out what this was for. At the appointed time she came over and after a while she asked my wife to pick up a card, and another, and yet another. She then said she could see her parents and our little son; they were all well and happy. Next was my turn. She described my profession and spoke of the good opinion entertained of me by my Senior Director in the British commercial house I was working for in Bombay. All this was true. She then said to me that someone very close to me was seriously unwell and no one--not even the person concerned-- seemed to know that it would be fatal. My wife and I were terrified at this. Mrs. Giles said to Fatima that she should not worry as it was not someone related to her. We could not understand this as the two of us are cousins. I could not sleep that night.

"On arrival in Bombay the next morning we learnt that everyone was well, and we soon forgot the conversation on board the ship. We spent three weeks in Hyderabad, during which we regaled my parents with accounts of our princely holiday in Berne. Then we returned to Bombay for me to rejoin duty. Two days later we were shocked to read in the 'Evening News' that Asaf Sab had passed away suddenly. What Mrs.Giles said had come true.

"It took our minds back to our long stay with Asaf Sab in Berne, the care that he took of us and the affection he showered on us. There had seemed no

sign whatsoever of any illness. He was keenly looking forward to Mrs. Asaf Ali's arrival and it was providential that they spent some time together, and that he passed away while she was with him. For my father, it was the loss of one of his dearest friends and intellectual companions. They had last met at Bombay airport the day Asaf Sab changed planes to go abroad. Father had had a message from him that he was passing through Bombay, and would he come from Hyderabad to see him off. Earlier, on 20th April 1952 he had written to say that his assignment in Orissa would end soon, and while the announcement about his next appointment had not been made, he wanted my father to know that there was talk of his being posted abroad. Without saying where, he referred to it as a nice place but added ironically that wherever he was destined to go, the end of the horizon was not far. In fact, he said, it was close now and, maybe, this would be his last journey.

"In October 1956 my father also passed away, just as suddenly, after a massive heart attack. And my mother, Masuma Begum died in March 1990. There can be no turning back of the clock, but fond memories of the past abound. As the saying goes, angels come to visit you, and you know them only when they are gone."

### **Nizamuddin: Final Resting Place**

Aruna sought the advice of Maulana Azad, through the communication channel of the Indian mission at Berne, on the final rites. Maulana Azad asked her to bring the body to Delhi for burial in the family graveyard of Khwaja Hasan Nizami at Nizamuddin, by the side of the grave of Asaf's mother. Hasan Nizami Sani recounts the circumstances in which it had been decided beforehand that Asaf Ali should be buried where he eventually was:

"Asaf Sahib was outwardly not religiously inclined, but religion was in his very veins. Before leaving for Europe as ambassador, when he came to see Khwaja Sahib for the last time he said his mother was buried in Khwaja Sahib's family graveyard. Though the place was now full, there was still a site vacant near his mother's grave: 'Please bury me there when I die.'

"Khwaja Sahib replied: 'Asaf, you are much younger to me. It should be for me to tell you to arrange my burial.' Asaf Sahib said: 'Who can say anything about life and death? As for me, I want to die before you do, and let you perform my rites.' It seems as if God willed it that way.

"Asaf Sahib had probably spoken to Maulana Azad about his wish. So, as soon as news was received of Asaf Sahib having passed away in Europe, Maulana Azad requested my father to get the grave ready by the side of Asaf Sahib's mother...It is thus that Syed Asaf Ali lies buried in Basti Ghiyaspur, or Nizamuddin as the area is now known."

On 6th April 1953 the Government of India issued a Gazette Extraordinary which carried the following tribute: "To the service of his country at home and

abroad he brought wisdom and experience, as well as zeal, learning, charm of manner and a great breadth of outlook. The Government of India mourn the loss of a distinguished and valued servant of the people."

## NOTES

1. India had to rely more than once on the Soviet Union's exercise of its veto power, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, to block resolutions that were adverse to India and favourable to Pakistan.
2. Sir William Hawthorne Lewis, who passed the Indian Civil Service examination in 1911 and served in Orissa in various capacities, beginning as Assistant Magistrate and Collector. He was Governor of the Province from 1941 till 1946.
3. Pen-name of Edatata Narayanan, Assistant Editor of the *Hindustan Times* who subsequently became founding editor of *Link* magazine and of the *Patriot* daily.
4. Cartoonist and publisher of *Shankar's Weekly*. He promoted children's art and literature for children.

## 13. Two Portraits

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Soon after Asaf Ali's death, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Hosain Alikhan, prominent educationist of Hyderabad, wrote pen sketches of their departed friend.

Hosain Alikhan (1890-1956) came to know Asaf Ali in 1913 in England, where the two were members of a circle which was presided over by Sarojini Naidu and which included Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Syud Hossain and Shahid Suhrawardy. On returning to his native Hyderabad in 1917, Hosain Alikhan entered the teaching profession and retired as Professor of English and Rector, Osmania University, in 1946. He was then appointed a member of the Hyderabad Public Service Commission. Hosain Alikhan's wife Masuma Begum (1901-1990) was a pioneer of the women's movement in Hyderabad and became the first woman minister in the Andhra Pradesh Government (1960-62). She later served as President of the All India Women's Conference and as chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board. Hosain Alikhan and Masuma Begum had four sons and a daughter. Two of the sons were named after Shahid Suhrawardy and Asaf Ali.

### **A REMINISCENCE: Hosain Ali Khan**

On 17th January 1954, the *Statesman* carried an article 'Asaf Ali: A Reminiscence' by Hosain Ali Khan. Excerpts from the article are given below.

"It was in the summer of 1913 that I first met Asaf Ali. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, who was in England at the time, had been invited down to Oxford by the Indian Majlis, which had arranged a dinner in her honour, and with her had been invited also Syud Hossain and Asaf Ali.

"Mrs. Naidu deputed me to show them round the colleges. It was slightly embarrassing to an undergraduate, dressed in loose, baggy, flannel 'bags' and a nondescript tweed coat, to be walking the streets of Oxford with two sophisticated gentlemen from London, dressed in the height of fashion--well-cut, well-pressed lounge suits, fancy waistcoats, butterfly collars, foulard bow ties

and bandanna silk handkerchiefs shyly peeping out of breast pockets. They were both, after going through many vicissitudes, destined to serve as their country's ambassadors, Asaf Ali at Washington and later at Berne, Syud Hossain at Cairo.

"All the three noble souls have passed on to their eternal harbourage, leaving India the poorer by their deaths: one in Lucknow, the other two in foreign lands, far away from their friends and relations. The ashes of one were scattered in the sacred rivers of her country; one lies buried in Cairo, and the other was laid to rest by the side of his mother in Delhi. Strangely, both Syud Hossain (in 1949) and Asaf Ali (in 1953) died of heart failure, and both at the age of sixty-five.

"In the vacations I used to meet them frequently in London, when we forgathered at the National Liberal Club of evenings and played billiards or chatted in the long, comfortable smoking-room. Parenthetically, the late Mr. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, I remember, was of the company there on three or four occasions in the summer in 1913, when he was on a visit to Europe. It is pleasant to recall that he was not quite so distant and frigid and ponderous and formal – and, might one add, formidable--in those days as he became later. From the club we would go for an aperitif to the Cafe Royal, and thence to the Monico nearby but more usually to some Soho restaurant for dinner, to which our cicerone was that fastidious gastronome and redoubtable trencherman, Shahid Suhrawardy, who possessed a marvellous culinary memory. We ended up the evenings at either Syud Hossain's rooms at Holborn or Asaf Ali's in West Kensington, talking till the small hours of the morning.

"These four, among whom there was perfect camaraderie, remained lifelong friends. The last time I saw them all together was in Delhi in the winter of 1946-47 at the house of Asaf Ali. These brilliant soirees--presided over by Sarojini Naidu--remind me of those famous lines of Francis Beaumont about 'The Mermaid'. Those were happy, carefree days. World War I was still a year or more away and life was pleasant and comfortable in England. Syud Hossain was doing freelance journalism then, sharpening his pencil, as it were, for the fine work he was to do a year or two later in conjunction with B.G.Horniman on the *Bombay Chronicle* and later at Allahabad as editor of the *Independent* which Pandit Motilal Nehru had founded.

"Asaf Ali, who had been called to the Bar a year or so before, spasmodically attended the law courts to gain first-hand legal experience, but was really devoting himself to literature, English and Urdu, reading the one and creating the other, for he had already produced some fine poems in Urdu, a few of which were published later in newspapers and journals in India. Asaf Ali was then interested in the *fin de siecle* literature of the 'aesthetic' nineties. I remember that in Asaf's study hung a photograph of Oscar Wilde encircled with an Indian garland of gold thread and gilt flowers. It was about this time that there came on the Douglas vs. Ransome case, in which Lord Alfred Douglas sued Arthur Ransome for libel for his book on Wilde which contained some unflattering

references to Douglas. It was during this trial that for the first time the suppressed portions of 'De Profundis' were read out in court, and in the evidence some unsavoury aspects of Wilde's life were disclosed. This and the presence in the court of some over-dressed, sniggering, slightly painted, effeminate youths--pansies, in modern, picturesque parlance--thoroughly disgusted Asaf Ali.

"He was so completely disillusioned that when we returned to his rooms from the High Court, he sat brooding for some time, muttering to himself, 'I didn't know, I never realised', and then rose and went determinedly to the wall where Wilde's photograph hung, took it down and, in spite of my protests, tore it to pieces, together with the encircling garland, threw them into the waste-paper basket and said, 'That's that.' I understood then that there was a strain of the Puritan in him which could not brook any deviation from the path of strict normality.

"Asaf Ali was widely read in the English literature of the 18th and 19th centuries. Poetry was his main love. 'Pope and his school of prosy poets' he abhorred; it was 'pure poetry' that appealed to him. Keats and Shelley he loved to the last. Browning's obscurity rather put him off the poet, but he liked his shorter lyrics. He had had, he once told me--indeed, who hasn't?--the Swinburne craze but, palled perhaps by the alliteration, had soon outgrown it. It was his love for the 'esoteric depths' of Francis Thompson that had really ousted what he called 'the monotonous music' of Swinburne.

"He had a great fondness for the exquisite poetry and the limpid prose of Mrs. Alice Meynell, whom he had met in London. I remember his reading out to me and savouring the fine flavour of the words in the generous tribute that Francis Thompson paid to her poetry: 'The footfalls of her muse waken not sounds, but silences.' Asaf Ali often used to read out in his musical voice her lovely sonnet 'Renouncement'. It was Alice Meynell, I have no doubt, who introduced him to the poetry of Francis Thompson, whom she had befriended in his days of destitution. Asaf Ali was greatly attracted by the mysticism of Thompson and his use of quaint archaisms and words rich in sound and colour. He never tired of reading 'The Hound of Heaven', that sublime and noble poem, one of the greatest odes of the later nineteenth century, a poem to live with. I still prize, as one of my cherished possessions, a copy of the beautifully got up limited octavo edition of Thompson's collected poems that he presented to me in 1914.

"Asaf Ali took Alice Meynell's death as a personal loss. He was in prison at the time and when I informed him of it, he wrote from Mianwali gaol in March 1923: 'You have given me a very sad piece of news in your last letter--that my favourite singer, the most enchanting of English poets, is no more. The lute from which there once flowed the subtlest melodies is shattered.' To console himself he says that he has been reciting to himself such of her poems as he knew by heart.

"Sometimes Asaf Ali was apt to allow personal prejudice to interfere unduly with his literary judgment. For instance, the jingoism of Kipling blinded him to the greatness of Kipling as a writer of short stories. It was Shahid Suhrawardy who introduced him to the lovely lyrics of Robert Bridges. At this time Asaf Ali was trying his hand at writing poetry in English. The 'fatal facility', as he called it, with which he wrote it and the lack of effort, due to indolence, to revise and prune it left him dissatisfied with the result. Years afterwards he told me that it was Shahid Suhrawardy who had advised him to write poetry solely in Urdu. I am glad he took the sound advice.

"His English prose, especially in his personal correspondence, tended to become rather ornate and orotund--'Asian prose', in Wilde's phrase--but he exercised great restraint in his public speeches, such as those delivered in America as Indian Ambassador there. Asaf Ali did not affect the bravura method of oratory and when he spoke extempore, he spoke simply and directly. He took full advantage of his fine, musical voice, which was clear, plangent and resonant. In talk it was always soft and gentle and low-pitched, with a lilt and a peculiarly attractive timbre in it.

"His Urdu prose was simple, chaste, rhythmical, fluent, impeccable, the Delhi Urdu which only a scholar of Persian and Hindi like him could write. He once told me an interesting thing. He said that whenever he was in doubt about a word or phrase or idiom in Urdu, he always approached his mother, who was a mine of information about these, especially the phrases and idioms peculiar to the 'Qilla' Urdu. From Mianwali gaol he wrote to me: 'I am making a tireless effort to shed foreign gems--Arabic and Persian borrowings. I desire now to achieve my end by employing pure Urdu, as far as practicable.' Some years later, in the midst of his political preoccupations, he wrote, 'I shall, if I am not weaned from the task prematurely, leave Urdu in bondage to my name.' This, I feel, is no mere empty boast, as will be amply proved when his work is collected and published. He will hold a high and distinguished place, both as poet and prose writer, in the history of Urdu literature.

"His political career, his sacrifices and sufferings in the cause of his country's independence, the terms of imprisonment--altogether seven years or so--that he underwent, I shall leave to be dealt with by more competent persons. This is a purely personal sketch of the man and a tribute to a friend of forty years' standing.

"Asaf Ali was reserved except in intimate company. His fine reserve was sometimes misunderstood as arrogance. His restraint was the instinctive dislike of a gentleman to hurt the feelings of others. He was a man of fine courtesy, old-world manners, open-hearted hospitality and unstinted generosity, qualities and traditions fast vanishing and redolent of a bygone age, a gracious way of life which in these days are perhaps deemed *demode* and rather quaint. Asaf Ali was introspective by nature and subject to occasional moods of depression, as if there were some deep disharmony within, some inner conflict, some deep-felt



spiritual malaise, something that troubled the depths of his soul. He had his hours of silent despondency and dejection, but by an effort of will he would overcome these passing moods and be again his usual sunny self.

"The poet in him seemed for ever bound, as it were, on an inward, spiritual quest, and even when immersed in the whirlpool of politics he could detach himself for brief moments and live an inner life of his own. It was in these short spells that he turned, as a relief, to his Urdu poetry and devoted himself to writing. His poetry was a soothing anodyne to his soul, and with it peace would seem to descend on his troubled spirit again.

"A very engaging trait in Asaf Ali was his great love for children – unfortunately he had none of his own. His voice had a special note of gentle tenderness when he spoke to them and one marvelled at the ease with which he could make friends even with a shy or sullen child, who would soon be prattling away gaily as if they were old friends. Another fine trait in him was his intense love for his mother who, on her side, worshipped him--her only child. He once told me that shortly before she died, as he was sitting by her bedside, he overheard her murmuring to herself a prayer for the success and prosperity of her son. While relating it he added: 'Whatever I am today is due entirely to my mother's last prayer and blessings for me.'

"When I saw him off in Bombay in July 1952 as he was leaving for Switzerland, he looked so remarkably fit that it was a surprise to learn that he died of heart disease barely nine months later. The poignancy of his death in a foreign country is tempered by the consoling thought that he was not alone in his last moments. His wife, who fortunately happened to be on a visit to Europe at the time, came to Berne. They spent the 2nd April happily together and after dinner retired to their respective rooms. About midnight he felt a slight discomfort in the chest, which he attributed to heartburn due to indigestion. When the pain increased he called out to his wife. She went to him and asked if she should send for a doctor. He said that was not necessary, as it was only indigestion. A little later he was dead.

"At the necropsy, on which the Swiss doctors insisted before issuing a death certificate, it was discovered that it was an advanced case of arteriosclerosis in the heart region. Thus passed away one of the finest, kindest, noblest men I have ever had the privilege of knowing, a man of courage, a great gentleman."

### **A SUMMING UP: Jawaharlal Nehru**

As Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru used to write regularly to Chief Ministers of the States--every fortnight if he could manage it--to share with them his views on national and international developments. He happened to be away from the capital from 30th March to 6th April 1953 on a tour of the country's north-eastern frontier region, and later crossed over to Burma and

visited some places in that country along with Prime Minister UNu. During this period occurred the death of two close friends of Jawaharlal Nehru. On 2nd April, Shafiqur-Rehman Qidwai passed away after a long illness. He was Minister for Education and Development in Delhi State during 1952-53, having earlier served for many years as a professor at Jamia Millia, a premier institution of national education. On the same day Asaf Ali died at Berne in Switzerland.

Jawaharlal Nehru, writing to Chief Ministers on 8th April 1953, begins by referring to his absence from Delhi on tour and to some hopeful international developments: the Soviet Union emphasizing peaceful co-existence, and Premier Zhou En-lai of China proposing the repatriation of willing Korean prisoners-of-war and handing over the remaining to a neutral state. Referring to the death of Shafiqur-Rehman Qidwai, Nehru said: "He was not an all-India figure like Asaf Ali, but perhaps few men were loved and respected so much in the circle of their acquaintance. In Delhi, Shafiqur-Rehman was immensely popular-- quiet and modest and devoted to his work, more particularly to education which was his special subject. All his life he had served the Jamia Millia on a bare pittance. He was one of that noble band who had helped Dr. Zakir Hussain to build up the Jamia and made it what it is."

And on the death of his other friend, Nehru wrote:

"Asaf Ali, our Ambassador-Minister at Berne, died suddenly on 2nd April...Asaf Ali's body was brought to Delhi and his funeral took place yesterday. The State honoured him in every way, but the significance of that funeral came from the multitudes of the citizens of Delhi who mourned him.

"Asaf Ali occupied many high offices of State during the last six years. He was a Cabinet Minister, our first Ambassador in Washington, the Governor of a State, our Ambassador-Minister in Berne, Austria and the Vatican. But his position in India's public life transcended even these high offices, for he was one of the old band which was associated with the struggle for India's freedom ever since the end of the First World War. His loss is great from every point of view but, more especially, for those who have been his colleagues and comrades during these several decades.

"He was in a sense symbolic of the old variegated culture of Delhi which, unfortunately, is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. He was essentially of Delhi and, therefore, the people of Delhi were greatly attached to him. A true representative as he was of Delhi culture, yet his was essentially a modern and active mind. Sensitive and fastidious, brought up in the tradition of the old leaders of Delhi and India, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr. M.A. Ansari, he was deeply pained at the occurrences in Delhi and elsewhere of August and September 1947. All that he and Delhi had stood for seemed to have been denied in those terrible days. And so he, like many others, while rejoicing in the freedom that had crowned our efforts, carried many a wound hidden away in the recesses of his heart. He was a fine writer both in English and Urdu and some of his poems and dramatic pieces in Urdu were notable.

"For nearly three years he and I and some others lived in the most intimate companionship in Ahmadnagar prison. There can be no better way of getting to know a person than by being in prison with him. All our virtues as well as all our failings come out in the strain and abnormal atmosphere of close confinement. Asaf Ali was ill for some time there and later, on transfer to a Punjab prison, he suffered severe illness which shook him up. He recovered gradually, but evidently he never quite got over that attack. Because of his considerable absences from India during this formative and hanging period of our national life, and even more so from the shock of partition and after, and the changes this had brought about in the texture of life in Delhi, Asaf Ali, though fitting in, had a somewhat lost look as if he was missing something he was used to.

"I believe he liked his latest assignment at Berne, Vienna and the Vatican and he sent us long and interesting reports. He was looking forward greatly to a conference we intend having at Lucerne in Switzerland in June next. This conference is meant for the Heads of our Missions in Europe. We are having these regional conferences and find them very helpful. Asaf Ali was particularly in charge of the Lucerne Conference and was taking a personal interest in the arrangements for it. I was myself greatly looking forward to this visit to Lucerne where I would meet him and others and discuss this changing scene in international affairs and try to understand it. He died suddenly with practically no advance warning and when he appeared to be in tolerable health. His wife had joined him only the day before. Perhaps it is better to die that way and not after a lingering and painful illness. The shock and sorrow is for others...

"So I return to Delhi from my north-eastern tour rich in many new and valuable experiences, but feeling rather desolate and the poorer for the loss of two friends and comrades. The old generation passes and we who belong to that generation, begin to feel a little lonely occasionally. We carry on with our work because it is that which gives some meaning and function to life."

## 14 . Voice of a Humanist

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The bulk of Asaf Ali's writing was done while he was, as a fighter for India's freedom, held as a prisoner by the British authorities. The first blooming of his prison literature was at Lahore, in 1930-31, and there was a more abundant flowering at Ahmadnagar Fort during 1942-44.

Despite the fact that during nearly all of the year 1943 he was reduced to a physical and emotional wreck on account of anxiety for 'the hawk-hunted nightingale'--his wife Aruna--Asaf Ali's literary output at Ahmadnagar was impressive: the allegorical play *Baghi*; the meditative and metaphysical *Parchchain* poems; the translation into Urdu of a play by Aeschylus; his own 'Sanjna', in English; the autobiographical notes telling the story of his life from childhood in the closing years of the 19th century till the Nagpur Congress session in December 1920; and the Random Jottings recording in the form of a diary the tumult of his inner life as well as the philosophical solace that he found, his reactions to events outside the fort prison, reflections on the past, and musings about the future. Presented in this chapter are a miscellany of extracts from Asaf Ali's writings on various themes, in broadly chronological order.

A great story-teller, Asaf Ali's maternal grandmother communicated to young Asaf the ancient Indian gift of creating and narrating tales. It is a tradition dating from the Panchatantra--regarded as the world's first anthology of artistic fiction with a moral, which travelled west through translations into Persian, Arabic and subsequently into numerous European languages. Asaf Ali wrote some stories of his own in English while in detention at Lahore during the civil disobedience movement of 1930-31. He sent them in the form of letters to his wife Aruna who was also in detention at the time at Lahore, in a separate women's jail. This is how some of the stories, brought together in 'Gossamer and Twilight', begin:

·Long before the birth of Christ, when Mathura was the haunt of hoary saints, and not of purple-robed sinners, the worshippers of Krishna met

and decided to erect a temple at Vrindavan, just where the holy Jamuna washed the roots of the plumed reeds. Temples built of stone there were many, but the devotees longed for a fane built of bricks of virgin clay--neither ploughed nor trodden by man or animal.

Away in the snow-capped mountains of Kailash there lived a hermit, whose richest possession consisted of wild flowers, butterflies, bees and song-birds uncaged and free, and a limpid rill. All along its course as it descended with a rush down a rocky bed, the cascading current stumbled over the rugged stones and shot up at intervals in jets and sprays. The scent-laden breeze stroked these sprays and jets with soft unseen fingers, and the sun and the moon clothed them with their light, and small rainbows danced over them.

There was a quaint and mysterious old garden in Budh Gaya in which were found rare flowers and trees of strange foliage, of iridescent colours. The gardener, whose strangely punctual appearance from nowhere was a source of boundless curiosity, had a deeply furrowed face and a bent and emaciated body.

In another story the Queen of Imagination, who is working alongside her gardener husband, asks: "Must we toil to produce these roses? Why don't roses grow from the marble floor of palaces?" The gardener replies: "Kings may tamper with mountains and make them yield porphyrie and marble, and precious stones, but they cannot tamper with the soil which alone yields sweet-scented flowers; the creator of Earth dreams in flowers only."

## Greek Drama for the Urdu Reader

In his ruminations on Urdu literature, Asaf Ali was struck by the paucity of translations of Greek literature in Urdu--or for that matter in Persian. He wanted to help in filling the gap and made a beginning during his detention at Ahmadnagar Fort, with 'The Persians' by Aeschylus which he rendered into Urdu from an English version. Asaf Ali writes in his Prison Diary:

*10th January 1943.* Greek and Latin literature is still foreign to Urdu, and so is Sanskrit literature to come nearer home. Arabic and Persian seem to claim almost all the attention of the Urdu scholars, and some have been attracted by English. An exception was Aziz Mirza who translated Kalidas's *Vikram Urvasia* and provided a learned Introduction. But while the study of Sankrit was encouraged in the heyday of Mughal influence, Urdu scholars neglect it inexcusably nowadays.

*6th February 1943.* While writing my Introduction to *The Persians*, I wanted to refresh my memory of the ancient Persian period. So I fell like

a hungry person on the *Shahnama* at least to create the Persian climate in my mind, though the work is hopelessly free of any references to Perso-Greek history or legend. Even the Persian classics are bare of Greek history and literature. I also read Grote, the acknowledged authority on Greek literature.

Asaf Ali intended 'The Persians' to be part of a larger project for introducing ancient Greek drama to Urdu readers. He says in the course of a letter of 27th January 1943 to Prabhat Gangulee<sup>1</sup>: "Somehow the Greek classics have escaped the attention of the literary world of our stagnant country. I am trying to break this fallow soil, and desire to present Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Menander and Aristophanes in the garb of Urdu. Don't be frightened by the ambitious sweep. I shall just select one drama from each of these, except Aristophanes who demands a double share." The ambitious literary project was not realised, at least partly due to the emotional and physical breakdown suffered by Asaf Ali during 1943 on account of anxiety for his wife.

Among the seven extant plays by Aeschylus, why did Asaf Ali choose 'The Persians'? Maulana Azad says in the opening paragraph of his Introduction to Asaf Ali's work: "The Greek play translated by Asaf Ali in Urdu prose and poetry is not regarded by modern critics as the best work of Aeschylus. This play was chosen for translation because it deals with the history of ancient Iran, and it was expected that those interested in Urdu literature would not be strangers to its background."

While the second statement is doubtless correct, the opinion of some critics on the merits of 'The Persians' cited by Maulana Azad is debatable. The play must be ranked among the best classical drama not only of Greece but of the world because of the vast empathy of Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.) that embraces the foe in war as well the compatriot, and brings out the common humanity of the victor as well as the vanquished. The theme of 'The Persians', believed to be the world's first historical play, is the sea battle of Salamis fought in 480 B.C. between a very large Persian fleet and a much smaller Greek naval force. The Greeks proved superior as fighters. They destroyed a large part of the Persian fleet, and in subsequent actions on land, too, they defeated the Persians whose king Xerxes, in the play, returns in tattered clothes and confesses responsibility for the disaster. Though the playwright was a Greek, and is believed to have been a witness if not a participant of the action at Salamis, his play is not a celebration of victory but is a tragedy presented poetically from the viewpoint of the Persians.

It is also noteworthy that, for Aeschylus, one of the manifestations of hubris, which is inexorably visited by punishment, is the reviling of gods other than one's own. Gilbert Murray, in the notes to his translation of 'The Suppliant Women', an earlier play by Aeschylus, says: "Observe that the Greek instinctively pays reverence to all gods; the Egyptian is represented as only recognising his own—like the Jew." In 'The Persians', too, there is a passage suggesting

that the irreverent acts by the Persian invaders of Greece make their future punishment inevitable. There can be little doubt that the humanist message of 'The Persians' must have appealed to Asaf Ali as much as the Iranian setting in selecting the play for translation into Urdu.

It was only in January 1974 that Asaf Ali's 'Parsi' was brought out in print by the Publication Wing of Delhi University's Urdu Department. The book of 246 pages includes a lengthy Preface in which Asaf Ali surveys the history, culture and religions of ancient Greece, Egypt, Judea and Iran and in this context discusses Greek literature. Maulana Azad's Introduction to the work, written on 28th June 1946, offers a masterly analysis of the reasons for the neglect of Greek--as well as of Sanskrit--literature by the Arabs and the Persians. An English translation of the Introduction, which brings out the significance of Asaf Ali's pioneering work, was published in *Link* magazine of 15th May 1966, and is reproduced below:

"It is surprising that during the days of their search for knowledge the Arabs were not attracted by the literary qualities of Greek language although they took interest in the various branches of Greek knowledge. The Greek doctors of philosophy and medicine are not unknown to Arabic literature and, under Arab impact, to Persian literature. But Greek poets, orators and dramatists are not known to them. Ibn Rushd wrote commentaries on Aristotle's essays and Plato's *Republic*, which contain references to Greek poets and dramatists. For instance, Aristotle has referred to Sophocles at several places. Because of lack of understanding, Ibn Rushd in his commentaries could not interpret the meaning of these references. The result was that he described tragedy as *marsia* and comedy as *hajo* and *bazal*.

"Arabs have been similarly apathetic to Sanskrit literature. Al Beruni in his *Kitab-ul-Hind* has referred to all the different branches of the knowledge of the Hindus; he was not unacquainted with the finer points of Sanskrit mathematics and astronomy as also Sanskrit metre and rhyme. But he has made no mention of the *natak* although, as in Greek, the principal literary genre in Sanskrit is its classical drama. European orientalists have given reasons for this indifference shown by the Arabs. Some are of the opinion that Greek literature was unacceptable to the Arabs because it was a vehicle of Greek beliefs. They are satisfied with this argument. To some extent it may be valid but we cannot rest content with it. We know that the Hindu astronomy was not devoid of Hindu beliefs but this did not prevent the Arabs from rendering the works of Hindu astronomy into their language. We will have to look elsewhere for the reasons for the Arabs' indifference. Arabic language was nurtured on poetry and oratory. The Arabs were so proud of their power of expression that they regarded others as dumb and called them *ajami*. They borrowed from the knowledge of others because of their own poverty but they were not attracted by the poetry and literature in other languages because they felt they had enough of these in their own treasury.

"There may be many views about the causes of the Arabs' indifference but about its consequences there is little room for any difference of opinion. One result of their indifference was that in spite of coming very close to the Greek language, Arabic remained unacquainted with the spirit of Greek literature and could not give even a glimpse of the characteristics of the Greek fine arts. In the post-Islam period Iranian learning and literature came under the influence of Arabic scholarship and therefore Persian also remained altogether unaware of the great treasures of Greek poetry and drama. Similarly, though some of the works of Sanskrit geometry, mathematics, medicine and philosophy were rendered into Arabic, the Arabs did not regard Sanskrit drama as worthy of enjoyment.

"Translation of some Sanskrit plays into Urdu has been attempted but as far as I know no effort has been made till now to translate Greek plays. The translation undertaken by Asaf Ali has opened a new path before Urdu writers. Translation is a difficult task as such, and if poetry is to be rendered into verse the difficulties increase. This translation should not therefore be judged to see if it contains in full measure or not the elements that go to make poetry. The only standard which can be applied in such cases is how far the characteristic features of the original have been retained in the translation, what is the standard of style on the whole, how fluent is the language used. I am sure if this translation is looked at from this point of view, its qualities and merits would be recognised by all men of taste."

### 'I' and 'We'

Asaf Ali wrote two major works in Urdu during the years of detention at Ahmadnagar. The first was '*Baghi*'<sup>2</sup> : the word *bagh* in Hindustani stands for a garden, and *baghi* for a rebel. The symbolism is abstruse, but the drift is that development of the self and self-expression are all to the good provided the process culminates in identification of 'I' with the rest of humankind as 'We'. The efflorescence of 'I' is fulfilled in the communion, as Martin Buber would put it, of I and Thou. There is also a plea for man living in harmony with, instead of over-exploiting, nature.

Asaf Ali himself provides a key to the allegory of *Baghi* in the course of the Prison Diary:

*6th November 1942.* One of the reasons for my missing to put anything into this diary for full ten days was the excitement of the growing garden. I sit the whole day out in the verandah watching the seedlings, the freshblown flowers and the blue or dappled sky, and listening to the amazing repertoire of the birds--whenever the bugles, the guns and the cacophonous tanks do not drown the bird songs. What a tragedy that with infinite opportunities of enriching one's life and soul with all that nature has created all round man, he must go murdering or preparing to murder



his own kind.

Anyway, I have been evolving in my own mind for a long time an ideal world and have, I hope, come to the point of giving it artistic expression. My first effort will be to write a play on the Revolt of the Flowers. My garden will be as living, pulsating and dynamic as the terrestrial globe with the entire universe as its environment. Of course the owner of the garden will be the most constant factor in the dialogue. But he will never appear. The identity of the master cannot be puzzled out by the flowers and the birds, or the great trees, or the oldest of the gardeners or the youngest of visitors.

*8th December 1942.* My magic garden, or the Floral Rebellion, is growing apace. The garden represents the macrocosm no less than the microcosm, each being the two ends of the same phenomenon. 'I' awakens to a new aspect of reality at every step. Its path through the magic garden is the will to be whatever 'I' desires to be--subject only to the condition that 'I' keeps the powers of observation wide awake and negotiates every pitfall and stumbling block with care, and not rashly. Rashness pays the penalty of disappointment, and inertia of stagnation.

*31st December 1942.* I have concluded the fourth Act of the Rebellion, and was in the middle of the penultimate speech by the resurgent and insurgent 'I' when my mind began to tire. I had intended to finish it today, leaving only the work of revision for the new year. And I may even yet finish it after dinner, if the 'Club' does not prolong itself beyond 10 tonight. However, since the story dictates itself, I cannot force its pace. But if this work succeeds, I can call myself a full-fledged author--not a desultory writer and wayward poet.

*2nd January 1943.* I had a bad night and awoke at 4 a.m. By 4.30 I was up, and after about half-an-hour's dip within myself started revising the Rebel of the Garden. In a rush I went through 64 pages, but about 8 a.m. I returned to the first scene and nearly rewrote it. The scrutiny which the Revising 'I' demanded became a veritable round of rewriting. How many I's are there within us! The amanuensis seems to rush away with half understood dictation, and then the Reviser pulls his ears, and the Super-Ego laughs at the game.

God knows who this multi-minded 'I' is within us. My Rebel is concerned solely with him, or should it be Him with a capital H? My rebel 'I', ignorant of his parentage and the place or time of his origin, gains admittance into the garden of the Universe as a helpless child who learns by experience, and then starts usurping the place of the Owner. His recurrent selves--branches, leaves and flowers of the main tree--explode into a succession of rebellions. Only in the last Act does he rebel against the entire tribe of 'I', against all that 'I' has achieved--his palace and his temple and all the false values he has invented. He establishes a new

family--a joint, communitarian family-- of 'We'. How briefly stated! So far 194 pages, mostly of deep questioning and dialogue. Once it is off the easel, I will try to English it.

The other major work in Urdu is *Parchhain*<sup>3</sup> (Shadow), a series of prose poems. They have something of the flavour of Rabindranath Tagore, whose writings Asaf Ali greatly admired. Here are some lines from *Parchhain*, translated by Asaf Ali himself:

I said to the silver moonlight  
 "Wash off the stains of shadows."  
 It said "They fill my empty lap  
 Like sleeping babes in cradles;  
 They are the reflection of flowers.  
 You know not how my longing arms  
 Are filled with aching emptiness without them.  
 If only Night would let me have  
 Its fadeless fullness how I would  
 Fondle them for ever in my heart."  
 I asked "And who is in the arms of night:  
 I thought you filled its emptiness with joy?"  
 Night heard and tears of dew began to drip.  
 If not the moonbeams whom does night embrace?  
 What a maze!  
 Time laughed and Dawn o'erspread the eastern skies.

Written in simple Hindustani (only the prefaces to each section are in Persianised Urdu), *Parchhain* probes the mystery of the relationship between reality and its reflection. It suggests the possibility of the transcendence of the dichotomy of seeming opposites. The work is suffused with the sentiment of devotional love common to Hindu Bhakti and Islamic Sufism, in both of which there is often a deliberate confusion, and fusion, of the earthly Beloved and of God. The imagery is native to the soil, as in the lines (translated by Gyan Singh):

It is said Ganga played in the locks of Mahadev for thousands of years.  
 Jamuna, too was in the lap of Mansarovar for ages.  
 When Ganga came down from the shoulders of Mahadev  
 And Jamuna from Mansarovar,  
 Each started frolicking severally.  
 Thousands of hamlets grew on their banks,  
 Vanished and reappeared.  
 Jamuna asked Ganga: "Where are you going?"  
 Ganga said: "Wherever fate might lead."  
 Jamuna asked: "May I go with you?"  
 Ganga said: "Meet me at the confluence."  
 Jamuna sang to Ganga:

"When you were tangled in the locks of Time  
 I was swinging on the swing of life.  
 Tell me of the confluence, that I may come and join you.  
 You and me, me and you, till when?  
 Let you and me become one  
 And go where fate takes us."

Asaf Ali writes about *Parchhain* in his Prison Diary:

*13th January 1943.* The conclusion of *The Rebel*, or rather *The Rebellion* of 'I', left me unoccupied while there was still, I suppose, a sufficient fund of stimulated mental energy to last a month. The translation of 'Perse' was the first channel, but before I had covered half a dozen pages a fresh command from the dictator within has switched me on to *Parchhain*--'The Shadow', or rather 'Shadows'. It is rhythmic prose in the form of arabesques or silhouettes.

In three days I have completed thirty resilient musings. They flooded in like the early rays of the dawn. "Shadows, shadows, shadows all round me. I cannot tear off my own shadow. It pursues me, goes ahead of me, it envelops me." This is how the musings begin.

"Its pinions folded tight to its breast, the eagle of Time swoops down on its prey. Where is the prey? Are you swooping down on me? Am I the prey of your Beauty?

"Why will you not cease talking to me in riddles? Why must I continue chasing shadows in a maze?"

"The sands in the hour-glass keep pouring themselves in and out of 'Yes' and 'No', hope and disillusion, pleasure and pain, each becoming the shadow of the other by turn.

"Is not today the current between the two banks, past and future? Why does not today stand still, untrammelled by the double shadow of yesterday and tomorrow?"

And so on. It is the wisest baby prattle I have ever lisped in lyrical lilt. I read some of them to Mahmud. His admiration overflowed the bounds of his usual discretion. He thought it was true literature: "And such style! Burn all your boats, and write."

Here are some more lines I read to Mahmud: "Where must I turn to find you? They say you are in places of worship and pilgrimage. Is any place of worship more sacred than my heart, or a place of pilgrimage more worthy than yours? Why must you wander far and not come to your own temple?"

"None said: 'Here is a letter for you.' Each reads his own thoughts and desires in your letters: for you will not put my name on the envelope. They purloin my letters and carry them about: for you write them without addressing me, so that others claim your words as meant for them. Why will you not write to me straight? I know by innuendos, the letter was for

me."

"Flowers are for all. But what they mean to me is a secret between me and the creator of flowers."

*16th May 1944* . I was looking at some of the things I wrote till January 1943, and they prove that I was nicely poised for much intellectual activity. 'Shadows', which are prose poems, struck me yesterday, as I was looking at them, as the shadow of much finer things unceremoniously nipped by my breakdown. I am trying hard to recapture the mood: but the requisite peace of mind is wanting. The mind, like the bud of a flower, waits on favourable weather.

*8th December 1944*. I have revised and rewritten some pieces of my 'Shadows' in Urdu. I read some of them to Maulana, and he was unusually enthusiastic and encouraging. I wrote them two years ago, before I was struck down by my anxiety for Rene.

The play 'Sanjna'<sup>4</sup> and the poem on 'The Parrot's Prison' are notable among Asaf Ali's writings in English while at Ahmadnagar. On 'Sanjna', he writes in the Prison Diary:

*8th December 1944*. 'Lady Precious Stream' of Hsiung fired me with the idea of writing the story of Sanjna (Twilight) and the Sun. It is one of the Vedic poems. I have written a short play on the theme in English. I think it is tolerably good for a week's intermittent labour.

Asaf Ali says in the course of his Preface to the play:

'Sanjna' comes out of the dewy dawn of India's poetic lisps. The earliest of Aryan poet-seers, sage-singers and saint-philosophers immortalised their mental thrills in rhythm and cadence, the dance and music of words. Their outpourings passed into scriptural sanctity over three thousand years ago. Nature filled the fresh and unsoiled imagination of these early poets with rich inspiration and kindled them to ecstatic rhapsodies which have echoed down the arcade of centuries. Their songs have been sung and resung by myriads of human beings in temples and huts; by sacrificial fires, and on the banks of sacred rivers... The East is the home of the story-tellers. Story-tellers were maintained at courts, and there used to be professional story-teller who made their living and went through life entertaining large assemblies. They have suffered a reverse, but they have not died out under the onslaught of the theatre and the cinema, the printed book and the radio.

And on the modern touch lent by him to the ancient myth, Asaf Ali writes: "The worst that can be said against the play is that an old picture is set in a new frame, the externals of which have borrowed from the stores of Today."

As the grandmother narrates the story and helps the children to enact it, she is asked by one of the little ones:

*Chandra*: What is Night, and why must it follow the Day?

*Grandma*: Now you don't seem to want the story to proceed on its own

legs, but must push and throw it face downward. Why, I should like to ask, does your back follow you wherever you go, why don't you leave it in your bed sometimes? Any why is your face behind your back? Time, too, has its face and its back. Its front is light and its back darkness; it must needs carry both, and it shows them to you by turns.

*Chandra:* But surely, Granny, my face is not behind my back.

*Grandma:* Ask your back. If it faces the other way, shouldn't your face be behind it? (All laugh.)

There is deep pathos in the poem written in December 1944 on a parrot, wounded by a falcon, that is caged by men within the walls of a prison, till it finds release in "freedom's other door":

### THE PARROT'S PRISON

Its crescent beak's vermilion  
And scaly sapphire claws,  
The flawless emerald plumage  
And night-blue feathery collar  
To camouflage its sportings  
And havoc in the branches  
Of vine and pomegranate,  
Secured it no protection  
From hungry, preying falcons--  
Death prowls in many guises.

Like startled peals of tocsin  
Flew up a flock of parrots  
Out of a pillared banyan--  
That sylvan shrine in foliage--  
And eddied in the screams of terror  
Of the youngest of revellers,  
Clutched tight in piercing talons  
Of a famished passing falcon,  
That stabbed the four dimensions.

Some trick of mocking chance  
Released the wounded victim,  
Wing mangled, bleeding, screaming  
It fluttered down unbalanced  
Like a yellow leaf in autumn  
Or a plane in flames, through air,  
The pilot shot and dying.

A prisoner at his labour  
One judged a murd'rous felon,  
Co-prisoner with the victims  
Of Freedom's grim illusion,  
Picked up the writhing parrot.  
"Fell swoop", cried other prisoners,  
"A miracle has saved it."  
They brought it to their dungeon.  
Its eye-lids closed in terror,  
Its cries grown hoarse and husky  
But the sound wing tense with longing  
To dip away to freedom.

The captive captors' wisdom  
Designed a cage for safety--  
A smaller inner prison.  
Night came with roosting shadows  
And found it caged in sorrow.  
It saw the slanting pencils  
Of double bars around it,  
And counted sorrow's fingers  
Down-pressed against its heart-beats.

They let it out at daybreak,  
Full sure it could not fly.  
It fluttered forth and hobbled,  
The broken pinion dangling  
In agony of longing  
And tried its hurting wing:  
The cage hurt more than pain.  
Some laughed to see its antics  
Some saw their own despair  
In the limping parrot's yearning  
For the sweep of turquoise skies.  
It hobbled to some bushes  
Nearby: and hid in terror,  
In hope's unshattered shelter.  
They clapped it back to safety  
And hoped to feed and nurse it  
And teach it other songs.

It heard its comrades singing  
In the neighb'ring banyan branches

Or wondering o'er its fate.  
Maybe it recognised  
Its mate's unsilenced wailing.  
It called back as if saying  
"I'm wounded and in prison  
But hear your saddening songs--  
Free skies mock broken pinions  
Which may not soar again."  
Maybe it said no such thing  
But called back to its mate.  
The parrots circled o'er it  
And vanished in a trice.  
Their screams hung in the air  
Like scent's retreating footsteps.  
All day it moped in sorrow  
And silence searched its heart--  
The soul pained more than pinion--  
In darkening shadows shivered  
Hope's fainting futile ray,  
The nesting song forgotten  
Its drooping head bent low.

Dawn found it stiff and moveless  
Within the prison bars.  
The floor of the inner prison  
Was littered with a corpse.  
Each prisoner mourned the passing  
Of a companion soul  
Released from Earthly prison  
At Freedom's other door.

## **Religions and the Family of Man**

Earnest thought will find charged expression, whether one is writing a poem or a personal letter. Asaf Ali thought constantly about religion and its use and misuse. He says in the course of a letter<sup>5</sup> from Ahmadnagar, intended for Aruna, on 9th October 1943:

I have been trying to clarify some of my ideas about different religions. In what may be described as the backward glance of science and rationalism, the history of religions presents a most fascinating subject. The human mind appears to have moved from plane to plane of thought in a close spiral, each subsequent plane of thought lying a level above the preceding one, but each resembling the former almost to the point of

identity. The three main areas and sources of development are the Egypto-Greek (including the Babylonian and Assyrian), Semitic and Indo-Chinese. Of course it is possible to sub-divide them. I lump the Iranian with the Indo-Chinese. Throughout the last five or six thousand years the tendency has been to fix the precise relationship man with the rest of the universe. Hence the journey from polytheism to monotheism and then a pantheism--I mean and Sufi and Vedantic pantheism, not the grosser and narrower pantheism of Rome. All this signifies a remarkable mental development and most creditable simplification of the complex phenomenon that is the Universe.

But, cast far apart in distant portions of the globe, men have failed to adjust the most essential relationship, i.e., between *themselves*. They should have begun by discovering and establishing human unity before anything else. They have tried to do it through religions and failed. And they have fallen back on the primitive urges--racial and national narrowness. Sometimes one hears that 'language' can be a common bond! Can it? This is another delusion.

A humane morality, by which I mean values based on the recognition of equal economic needs and rights of all human beings is, to my mind, the objective towards which mankind has to travel to get over the periodic distress through which the world has had to go. But I fear that the desired consummation is still a distant goal. The wise idealist is one who discourages optimism and consequently impatience. Nature has had to crawl at a snail's pace for hundreds of millions of years to produce man; and man has laboured for at least half-a-million years to come to his present state. Ideas are always centuries in advance of the existing conditions...Realists, therefore, accept ideals as guides but never lose a sense of proportion, and make the best of the hard logic of reality.

Religion is ennobling when it is practised by those who have tried to understand the deeper and profounder purposes underlying it. But it can be incredibly debasing when it is relied upon by narrow-minded bigots and unreasoning zealots. I fear much of the world is writhing in the hands of the latter.

I remember a friend of mine<sup>6</sup> once saying (and he was otherwise an intellectual): "The most estimable man who does not profess my religion cannot be equal to the most despicable of my co-religionists"! And I heard once the identical assertion based on colour. These are man's weak and blind spots. Some day he will get rid of them and make the human family happier and better. Meanwhile those who feel and know these things must hold their souls in patience, and pray that God's sublimating processes may rescue humanity from its follies and sins.

Man's 'conquest' of outer space, which came after Asaf Ali's time and has raised the spectre of star wars, underlines the primary importance of that



harmony in the space within and between individuals and human communities of which Asaf Ali speaks. In a Prison Diary entry of 10th November 1942 he writes:

Shorn of their complex religious ritual, Diwali, Bhaiyaduj (Raksha Bandhan), Basant and Holi were adopted by the Mughals and adapted to the growth of a common Indo-Mughal culture. In any case, I need not apologise for interesting myself in a Hindu festival, for I see no reason why Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs *and* rationalists in India should not participate in one another's festivities, without necessarily sharing one another's religious beliefs.

I was born a Muslim, and I have almost since the age of 15 or 16 steadily re-examined, evaluated and sifted the fundamentals from the rituals and dogmatic assertions in every quarter. Philosophy and science were my favourite subjects at college, and have remained so. This has helped me to what I hope is a just appreciation and assessment of the basic concern of all religions with the rules of human conduct. While one should scrupulously steer clear of irrational, superstitious and degenerate distortions and practices, which reduce religions to travesties of the purer essence, one can always win respect and toleration for one's own beliefs and faith by a liberal appreciation and understanding of others.

For a rationalist, who can be nothing but a humble seeker after truth and light, it is all the more imperative to be *gentle* in rejection, magnanimous in appreciation, and yet remain firm like a rock against the erosive waves of ignorant superstition and unreasoning fanaticism.

Asaf Ali writes in the course of a letter to Aruna on 22nd November 1942: I have been refreshing myself with the Old and the New Testaments. This time I have read the four gospels with a new key. After all, the 'reporters' were steeped in the Hebrew, Chaldean and Egyptian lore. The encrustations under which they have buried the jewels have attracted more attention than the sublime values which they hide. And Paul, after he had surfeited himself with persecution, brought his own erudition and genius to the building of the Church as a complex superstructure.

Is it not amazing that the Jews, whom Jesus came to reclaim, crucified him in body, and others who came into his--or rather the Pauline--fold today crucify Jesus in spirit? Alas, it has been the same with the followers of all religions, honourable exceptions apart. They profess what they practise not, and use their religion for a cloak and a veil for their thoughts and deeds.

The mutual carnage of man by man will not cease until the disinherited and despoiled of this earth come into their own on a footing of genuine equality--the white and the black, the brown and yellow--all as brothers. They must become partners in a common endeavour to rescue mankind from ignorance, superstition and slavery in any shape or form, and to place

them all on the throne of what intelligence combined with labour can achieve.

On the universal human heritage to which men and women of every generation everywhere are heirs, Asaf Ali writes in the course of the comments he put down during November 1944 on the Ms. of Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*:

If humanity is thought of as a whole, as it should be, the achievements of the great men – sages, poets, saints and intellectual giants--not merely of one race or one place but of all races and of all places are the proud heritage of all human beings. Therefore I would like to see the present generation of the human race nurtured on this universal heritage so that a healthy international outlook is created. Only thus can the ideal of a society of rational human beings, wedded to progress, be realised.

I feel quite as thrilled when a beautiful poem or a profound thought, or a fine piece of art or anything else of a sublime nature comes before me out of the past--whether it is out of ancient Egypt or China, India or Chaldea, Greece or Rome, Persia or Arabia--as when I come across anything modern and elevating, whether out of the West or the East.

The moment anyone expresses a preference on racial or national grounds, it sounds to me narrow. Thought, beauty and practical achievements are universal, and they should be the heritage of all.

From the Gujarat Jail in Punjab where Asaf Ali was imprisoned for his participation in the Individual Satyagraha, he writes in May 1941 to his friend Mulla Wahidi, editor of *Adib*, that a corner may be reserved in the magazine for some of the essays he was writing on India's composite culture. Asaf Ali says:

India may remain one or may be divided into Hindustan and Pakistan, but the importance of this culture will remain. Even if the country is divided into ten pieces, this composite culture will compel the neighbours to live and let live. Even if they fight they will have to come to terms one day with the map of this composite culture.

If you have a collection of Iqbal before you, just have a look at the poems on Rama and Nanak. In addition, kindly see certain parts of 'Tasveer-e-Dard'. If you come across any more of such poetry, please let me know. I am thinking of compiling an anthology of such poems.

I am having a look at Faizi's translation of the Geeta. There are hundreds of couplets in it which a Muslim cannot for a moment disown. The religion of the Sufis is of the same genre. Here there is a confluence of Hindustan and Islamistan. The world is bound to reach this destination, if not today may be tomorrow, and if not tomorrow the day after. The barriers which have been erected between members of the human family by the walls of unfamiliar languages will be brought down one day. It is imperative that thoughts are freed from the linguistic prisons, and every human group

recognises the spiritual inspirations of the other. Then they will see whether the differences are, as the eyes ordinarily perceived earlier, as between black and white or, in reality, as the difference between the yellow rose and the red.

The moving factors of human minds are the same, the warp and woof of life are the same, the world around is the same, the same journey, the same destination. Of course, in this scenario there are selfish and self-serving elements in all classes, all groups and in all parts of the globe. They make millions of people their playthings, make nation fight with nation, family with family and brother with brother to their own benefit. It is a large subject. But true insight and perception demand that old ties are retrieved from the dust of negligence, and are strengthened. These are jewels which will one day adorn the crown of peace and harmony of entire mankind.

## On Prayer

*13th December 1943.* I slept last night after long and earnest prayer for Rene and again since rising I have prayed for her.

Has prayer any meaning? The materialist will maintain that it is self-delusion. The problem of birth, growth and death has long baffled me, as it does everybody. During the last ten months especially, I have pondered over the physical and psychological phenomena, the thoughts and feelings, relating to the fact of existence and its termination or transmutation. Out of this has emerged a deep faith in prayer.

Prayer is the last appeal of the self in the consciousness of helplessness. There is no denying oneself this last effort. And it cannot be wholly a futility. In the larger scheme of the universe, it must surely bear some consequence. Now there are various ways of looking at it. In respect of the ego from which the prayer emanates, it has the effect of relaxing the tension and mental oppression generated by the consciousness of impotence. It can be argued that prayer can result in abuse, by encouraging the immature or only partially mature mind to fall back on prayer. The instinctive inclination to follow the line of least resistance is likely to commend prayer as a substitute for arduous endeavour to overcome resistance. This can weaken one's character. But if prayer can be combined with the utmost human endeavour, or in other words if one undertakes every effort in a spirit of prayerfulness and humility, it should add strength to one's effort.

Then, in respect of the object of one's prayer, I have an undemonstrable belief that prayer can and will be answered when it does not ask for the impossible. You cannot resist and get over the operation of natural laws merely by putting up a prayer. No steam or power engine shall function by the intensest wishing, without steam or power. Now, one whose faith

is greater and deeper than mine, may cry out: "Oh, you of little faith!" But I cannot rise to such heights of faith.

But prayer is no less ingrained a call than love, or the recognition of beauty, or even hunger and thirst. And since it is a fact of life, it cannot be a pure futility. If telepathic communication is possible, there is no reason why my penetrative thoughts should not travel all round the globe--like my voice over the microphone, through a powerful transmitter--and seek out Rene and be silently picked up by her. If not at once, some time.

In a universe of eternal causation which is based on constant change through a succession of action and reaction, it is not only possible but highly probable that prayer should evoke a response.

### Zero and 'Shunyata'

*10th November 1944.* I have not returned to these jottings since 24th October. I have been caught up during the interval in a cyclone of intellectual gusts -reading, pondering, and endeavouring to penetrate the profoundly dark but non-material veil of universal mystery. And yet in moments of illumination you catch a fugitive glimpse of something which suddenly lights up a whole vista, reaching beyond the frontiers of the perceptible to the mist-wrapped peaks of Reality. And for a moment you feel that you have discovered the way through the labyrinth which has baffled pilgrims to the island of Life in the limitless sea of the unknown and perhaps unknowable. What a pell-mell of metaphors and similes! But we have no language to express the truth we *feel* down in our being.

I have read much of significance lately, none of your modern stuff. How few seem to understand the true meaning of some of the words used by the ancients. Take for instance Zero. People talk of it as the symbol of nothingness. I have thought about it for years, and built a philosophy round it. There is no such thing as nothingness: it is really the general *Isness* or ever present *Is* or Being, which is the matrix of perpetual change. In fact Zero is the matrix of infinity, or infinity itself. Not nothing, but everything. To our limited perception, it is minus to infinity in its unmanifest *Isness*, and plus to infinity in its manifest *Isness*. Both ends escape our grasp, and trail off into mist. But they come into our ken in those flashes of illumination I have referred to. I have given expression to this in some poems, and in prose of an imaginative character.

During the last few days I have found that Nagarjuna, one of the thinkers of ancient India--the greatest of them, according to some--said almost exactly this some two thousand years ago. In his theory of Shunyata or Zeroness(which his commentators wrongly render as Nothingness),

Nagarjuna touches the frontiers of the absolute. Unfortunately his interpreters have gone so far wrong as to declare his metaphysical thought as reducing Reality to Nothingness.

I have found Jawaharlal (in his *Discovery of India* manuscript, which he has given me to read, inviting suggestions--rather flattering) going wrong on this point. But it is understandable: for he is going by Nagarjuna's commentators or critics. Only a Russian scholar, Stcherbatsky, seems to have gone near enough to Nagarjuna. He thinks that Shunyata sounds like relativity. If relativity is another term for manifest-unmanifest Reality, I would agree. But Einsteinian relativity (which I fear I do not fully grasp yet) is too physical for me to identify it with the absolute Isness of Reality, with its rhythm of change in a constant immutability. The subject is as vast as the universe, and I am so instinct with it that it is futile to try to put it down in a few sentences.

Words can have infinite meaning, radiating like the rays of the sun, but only if they strike responsive chords among those who hear or read the words. Can you see Zero is Infinity and Eternity? Can you imagine it as the Sun of Being which is constantly sending forth beams of Becoming? Who is this 'I' and who is 'You'? Why, there are so many I's and You's in me, who keep conversing among themselves, that poor I, imprisoned in this fictile frame, am startled by their amazing adventures in the realm of thought. So, I come to the conclusion that I am the trysting place of Infinity and Eternity. And though forbidden to venture out of my prison of Being, I am the Zero from whom all the I's and You's are born and in whom they lie buried.

The reader may start wondering whether mine is a case of advanced but harmless insanity. And what is insanity? Just another mental dimension caused by some trick of Zero. And to the insane, their world is no less real than is this world to you and me. Oh, we are a whole lot of bedlamites, for we chase after shadows, and are shadowed by the mightiest shadow of all, Death. That is why the Hindus call both Time and Death *kala*, and consider it the only reality. It dies not, it only changes.

Zero is the only reality. The past is zero, but the past was future at one time, and future is constantly flowing into the past. And the past and future are both in the eternal 'present'. The entire Eternal-Infinite is always there, and only we who are Zeros in our own right cut up the indivisible map of Space-Time for our convenience. The Eternal Zero remains unaltered while the perceiving Zero calls Flux reality. Now, is this the talk of an insane person? If so, I prefer to be insane rather than share your dense sanity. Do you hear, Mr. Whoever-you-are within me? Never mind, we have had an interesting discussion, or monologue if you like. But the Universe is God speaking to us, if only we can hear.

## **A Poet's Meditations**

Presented below are some reflections, taken from Asaf Ali's prison diary, on different aspects of the central question of the purpose, if any, of man's brief existence on a speck in the universe that is our earth.

I have sometimes watched two eagles soar high and higher in circles round each other until they look like specks. Sometimes they seem to disappear behind the clouds. But suddenly they reappear head down, pinions held close to the body, speeding straight through space like shooting stars. And as suddenly they arrest their nose-dive just a few yards above your head and begin a slow sailing on even keel, round and round in the air. Sometimes they drop into their nests, and sit on the uncomfortable bed of dry twigs and bleached bones and broken pieces of eggshells, looking forlorn but alert.

So are one's thoughts and memories. The pair Yes and No soar up and up and round and round as far as the eye can reach, beyond the sun and the moon, beyond the shapely clusters of stars, beyond the milky way. They sport with and chase each other, now they find the space flat and now they discover the curved space of relativity. They infer that the stars are worlds other than their own, peopled with other tenants, other sounds and colours, other shapes and forms, and other series of powers and laws than those with which we are familiar. They dispute between themselves the possibility of time-space being an ocean like the one round the globe of our earth, a curved, infinite eternal continuum which holds all the belts of star-islands in one of which our little solar system is tucked away.

And so on and on until, tired and baffled, Yes and No return to their shabby nest on this earth, in this fading body with its gossamer brain which weaves wonderful tapestries of thought. Have you seen the dirty hovel where the most precious shawls are woven and embroidered? Time and Pain, the twin brothers, allow us our temporary habitation for such work as we can do with the shawls and tapestries of our thoughts.

And memories? They are like the dry bones which were once full of juicy meat. When, like the sporting eagles, we return tired to our nests after having sailed long in the regions of Time, memories make us hunger again for fresh food, for newer experiences.

At odd moments when I feel one with the visible and invisible reality of this universe, I am convinced that behind, throughout and ahead of all is a living power, eternal and infinite. For lack of a better expression I call it God.

But where and how I come into this stupendous scheme of things I fail to guess. Occasionally I seem to myself to be a subtle instrument in infinite

space and time that receives and reflects as much as its capacity permits. But I fail to understand why I should disappear like a fleeting spark, or like an electron which for a trice traces a path, only to disappear into infinity.

The stream of life, with the waters of consciousness rendered turbid by sorrows, continues to flow on within the banks of the past and the future. The mystery of the universe, and the apparent purposelessness of life, does not yield to the key of human intelligence. None has succeeded in unravelling the mystery so far, and it seems unlikely that anyone will.

Immediate purposes are formed by man, either driven by instinct or with the aid of reason. But the ultimate purpose of existence remains unascertainable. Religions, confessing the insignificance of man's intelligence, console human inquiry with the promise of an after-life and the continuance of individuality, and meanwhile call for submission to divine will. For those who can be content with the consolations of religion, the burden of life is eased. They find the sorrows of life less crushing.

Yet others who profess to regard individual life as a mere spoke in the social wheel, and worship an organically unfolding social God, find something worth their while in activities which contribute to the growth of their divinity.

But there are those who face the hard realities of suffering and grief without seeing them serve any purpose. The ultimate futility of individual life is not redeemed even by the collective march of mankind. True, some slight change, which some would call progress, does come about in the course of centuries: But any essential difference is so slight that it does not relieve to the sense of individual helplessness.

'Whither?', the individual soul cries out. But the wheel of Time does not pause for an answer to be received. The pain and grief of the human condition continue, while the bubble of pleasure, bursting and forming again, carries within its fragile inverted cup the air of hope and lures the sufferer on till his departure for the Great Beyond. The riddle remains unsolved, and we must keep feeding the insatiable maw of Death.

I have not gone back to poetry yet. And every time I think of poetry, it brings on a fit of nostalgia. Who--a few happy exceptions apart--is able to do what his soul yearned for? The longings of an average human being (and I am one--though somewhat easily versatile, which is a curse) generally remain buried under the debris of one's early dreams. Life in its stride steps on individuals 'as we do on tender young blades of grass, wounding some and tearing up others.

Hafiz, the Persian master, has said: "On the sapphire page (of the heavens) it is written in gold--None has survived, and none yet shall survive."

Rather a pessimistic note. But the general appearance of things, as we view them from the standpoint of the brief voyage of visible being, does not encourage individual optimism. Only a long-range view of Reality, under the aspect of eternity, helps to allay pessimism. Nothing is destroyed, nothing is ever lost. Nature conserves even the most infinitesimal of its contents--yes, even an unexpressed thought which passes in our mind finds a lodgement in the scrap- book of nature. As the inner eye of human intelligence (I mean scientific vision and not anything spiritual) succeeds in discovering the pattern of coherence, the entire epic of life will be revealed and the hidden face of Reality will become visible.

I watched this morning what could serve as a parable of puny man's ego challenging the existence of God. On catching a ray of the rising sun, a dew drop, drunk with the inebriating kiss of life, challenged the glory of its creator. Before the sun had touched the frontier of the first half-hour, the sportive breeze kissed off the impudent being, and the process of attrition reconverted the dew drop to invisibility. Is this not the story of every ego in this universe?

We inhabit the matrix of Time for a while and, inebriated with the kiss of life, we question and challenge the Creator in a myriad ways of nescience till we are kissed out of existence by the onrushing current of Time. But are we completely sponged off? Is anything completely wiped out of existence? No. Shapes and forms and combinations change in Time-Space, but the essence of the mind and the will endure. The cycle, or rather the spiral, of Being does not and cannot cease its constant journey. It could stop only if Time and Space ceased to exist. And is it conceivable that either of them did not exist any time, or that they will ever cease to be? I can imagine almost anything dispersing in Time-Space, but disappearing--never. Does my voice or my image at any time cease to be? Are they not journeying on invisible waves to the farthest reaches? Radio and television suggest the answer.

The past is in the seed-plant-flower-fruit, and the future is in the same seed-plant-flower-fruit spiral. Nothing is outside the whole, which always is and the is includes the past and the future.

It is true, only too true, that in the great pageant of ever renewing eternity, the strivings and doings, happiness and sorrow, which fall to the lot of mortals just do not count. But in the life of mortals every moment is an eternity, whether of pain or pleasure. Personal events constitute our world, and our brief eternity.

What am I? An answer that appeals to me is: the striving after growth to the point of maximum consciousness of the universe. I, as a man, represent but a stage in this journey, and heaven knows how many light-years will



be required to complete the journey.

But even I--a puny man on this earth which is but a speck in the infinite ocean of time and space--I am an entire universe in myself. And every moment of my experience is in itself an eternity.

Individual life, within the brief interval of time from birth to death, is obviously not all of reality. Eternity is the span of the universe with all its visible and invisible constituents of material, moral and spiritual existence, seeming as if they are kneaded by a purposeful will and governed by inexorable laws. The integrated whole is for all time, and therefore its parts cannot just fade out of the totality. If individual life is no more than the flicker of a lamp, all action becomes meaningless. But I am convinced that each life leaves its impression on the total existence and modifies it to the extent it has acted within the whole.

The simplest and the commonest elements of life are pregnant with profound meaning. It is through the interplay and the weaving together of these elements that life proceeds towards complexity and the rarefaction of grossness in a spiral of mounting levels. At the base are the simplest elements, and their permutation and combination result, in the superstructure, in countless varieties of forms, numbers and qualities.

Every seed is a promise of eternal growth. In its congealed appearance it looks a simple and almost insignificant thing. But once it is placed in favourable environment and has been allowed to burst its shell, it draws into itself all it needs for its nourishment. Leaving the cracked shell behind, it grows stronger and bigger, sucking in salts, air, water and sunshine. It becomes instinct with sap, growth, colour, nectar and scents, which reach their culmination in the complex flower. It then proceeds to the next stage of its eternal life. Employing the agency of animate bees and winged insects and crawling caterpillars, and even the inanimate breeze, to promote its fertilisation, it kneads acids and glucose into several stimuli of varying taste in its fruits, tempts men to consume its gifts and moves them to desire its multiplication.

This is but a sketchy presentation of Nature's ways of complex progression. If it is so with the seed of plant and tree, which must stand rooted in one fixed spot, should it not be a million times more complex in nature's higher creation, man? Man is a seed, and for his fullest efflorescence he must draw on the resources of the entire universe. Individuals are but drops in the stream of humanity which has flowed for uncounted years and will flow on for ever--at least for the relative 'ever' of human conception. The absolute Ever of the Time-Space continuum is beyond our conception.

I recognise that I am an utterly insignificant part of this universe, with an infinitesimally brief existence. And yet, I transiently in this earthly coil on this tiny planet, even I am an eternity and infinity in myself. Any moment can reveal to me eternity and infinity in their panoply. Have you not observed a drop of dew, or a particle of dust, suddenly illuminated by the rays of the morning sun, when the whole of its being catches the effulgence and reflects its glory and majesty? Similarly, the human mind is capable of glimpsing the entire beauty of the universe.

It may be asked how this is possible for us, imprisoned as we are within the five walls of our senses which afford but a narrow window on the bewildering immensity of time-space. I have only to give rein to my imagination, and it leaps forward and illumines, like a flash of lightning, the dark immensity all round, revealing the manifest efflorescence of the one total reality. The inner god who presides over the imagination reveals, in flashes, the whole cosmos by bringing to a focus the entire continuum. But this calls for the concentration of our being on the pin-point where total reflection takes place. It depends on our capacity to rivet the gaze--the inner gaze--on whatever facet is turned towards us. It may be beauty and harmony, the striving for perfection, the immutability of nature's laws, or the precision of order--or several of these together. When we see the total reflection, we can glimpse the effulgent countenance of eternal Reality.

I have never doubted the truth of this revelation. But during this period of agonising anxiety in the Ahmadnagar Fort prison, I have reflected more deeply on the problems of human destiny. Before this, I often came to the conclusion that death was the drop-scene of life. A lyre once broken ceased to bring forth music, a flower once withered ceased for ever to hold colour and fragrance, pollen and nectar. And all individuality came to final termination with death. But during these months I have tried to push my thought a stage further. What, after all, are music, colour, perfume, nectar and beauty in relation to the human being? And human thought, which is intangible? Are they nothing coming out of nothing and vanishing into nothing? Surely it is not an illusion to see in the seed innumerable trees, flowers, fruits, colours and reservoirs of nectar and odour, and a promise of eternity so to speak? Similarly, in each individual being are found the material for eternal and infinite multiplication.

We are ripples in the eternal-infinite continuum. All things come out of the vast ocean of being, and return to it. The whole remains for ever and ever the same, whatever the shapes and forms which its parts pass through. I realise that howsoever clear your own vision of Reality, you cannot convey it fully to anyone else. But I am convinced that when I have quitted this mortal coil, I shall be reunited with the ultimate Reality which will receive my individuality into the frame for which it has qualified itself.

Wishful thinking, you may say. True, I do not want utter annihilation to be my destiny. And the desire for immortality has been present in the bulk of conscious humanity for uncounted ages. In the sphere of the human race, it finds expression in the continuation of the species. In the case of an individual, it seems to me that the impress of his or her activity is the evidence of relative immortality.

Are we completely sponged off? Is anything completely wiped out of existence? No. Shapes and forms and combinations change in time-space, but the essence endures. Being has no power to extinguish itself. The cycle, or rather the spiral, of being cannot cease its constant journey. It could stop only if time and space ceased to exist. And is that conceivable? I am sure I shall not disappear except in the cramped form of my ego in the prisonhouse of this body.

Existence is like the ferment in leaven. Every bubble, as it rises for a trice and seems to disappear, only marks the process of becoming while the entire being is there. It is almost impossible, for lack of precise analogies and terms, to express the ultimate truth. But deep down in my soul I feel the rhythmic pulse of the living and pulsating whole. How can you say it is too big a claim when the universal sun has been, by His total reflection, a guest in this humble dew drop's heart? How can the guesthouse of the eternal be other than eternal in its essence?

## NOTES

1. Youngest brother of Aruna Asaf Ali.
2. Included in *Armaghan-e-Asaf*, Department of Urdu, Delhi University, 1966.
3. Published by Anjuman-e-Tarraqqi-e-Urdu (Hind), Allahabad (year not stated).
4. Included in *Gossamer and Twilight*, printed for private circulation at Cuttack, 1951.
5. Asaf Ali Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library.
6. The reference is apparently to Maulana Mohammad Ali.

# Epilogue

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In the ordinary course, nationalist Muslims should have come into their own in free India. They had stood for territorial patriotism and democracy even at the cost of incurring the hostility and contempt of the separatists. Nationalist Muslims should have been encouraged to educate their co-religionists, numbering some 35 million, who stayed back in partitioned India to overcome their sense of separate identity and to join their fellow citizens in the tasks of building up free India as a strong and progressive nation on the basis of democracy, with equal rights and responsibilities for all citizens.

Instead, a series of developments contributed to perpetuation of the two-nation mentality. First was the mishandling of the question of the princely State of Jammu & Kashmir, ruled by a Hindu Maharaja. The majority of the population were Muslims but the principal political party of the State, led by Sheikh Abdullah, stood for the Indian model of democracy as opposed to Pakistan's Islamism. The Maharaja had not yet acceded to either of the two new Dominions by 15th August 1947. Another State which stood out was Hyderabad, which had a Hindu-majority population but was under a Muslim ruler. Hyderabad was right in the heart of the new Indian Dominion, while Jammu & Kashmir was contiguous both to India and Pakistan. A third problem State was Junagadh, on the western coast, which was surrounded by Indian territory and had an overwhelmingly Hindu population. Its Muslim ruler acceded to Pakistan, and Governor General Jinnah had no compunction about accepting the accession.

In terms of the scheme of partition that was drawn up by Mountbatten and accepted by the Congress and the Muslim League, it was for the ruler of a State to decide which of the two new Dominions he might accede to. Even earlier, Jinnah had made it clear in the course of his talks and correspondence with Gandhiji in 1944 that the Pakistan resolution of 1940 was meant to apply only to British India and not to the princely States. But Pakistan was in no position to govern Junagadh. When the people's indignation broke out, the Nawab who was a "wastrel whose chief passion was dogs, of which he kept over 150"<sup>1</sup> flew

to Pakistan taking as many dogs as possible with him. In the chaotic situation that ensued, popular leaders of the State appealed to the Indian Government for restoration of order. It was to legitimise a reversal of the ruler's decision that the Indian Government said it would arrange to hold a plebiscite in Junagadh. The position was quite different in respect of Jammu & Kashmir. After the State was attacked by raiders armed and equipped by Pakistan, the Maharaja sought Indian assistance to repel the aggression and signed the Instrument of Accession on 26th October 1947. The action was supported by Sheikh Abdullah, leader of the principal political party in the State, for whose legal defence in a case launched by the Maharaja's administration Nehru and Asaf Ali had visited Srinagar. And yet the Indian Government announced that acceptance of the accession was provisional and subject to ascertainment of the people's wishes. This meant that the lives of Indian soldiers, and Indian money, were being committed to the defence of Jammu & Kashmir while leaving open the possibility of the State not remaining part of India.

The Indian Government could have refused to accept the J & K ruler's accession and thereby thrown Sheikh Abdullah to the wolves, as had been done earlier in respect of Abdul Ghaffar Khan. The other option was to accept the accession as final. The third course, of conditional acceptance, befitted a college of saints rather than a Cabinet of practical statesmen. There could be no reason other than the religious complexion of the population of Jammu & Kashmir for not accepting the ruler's accession unconditionally. It was as if Jinnah's two-nation theory had rubbed off on the very persons who had resisted it. The primary responsibility for the extraordinary decision, which proved politically and financially costly for India, was that of Jawaharlal Nehru, who as Prime Minister took direct charge of the affairs of Jammu & Kashmir. The accession, and eventual integration with the Indian Union, of all the other princely States numbering several hundred were handled, with remarkable success, by Sardar Patel who headed the newly created States Department from 5th July 1947.

Another instance of treating religious minorities differently from other citizens, in contradiction of the secular approach, was the confining of the reform of family laws, in the mid-1950's, to Hindus. The effect of these laws was to enforce monogamy, provide the relief of divorce in the event of failure of a marriage, and to give a fair share to women in succession to property. Commenting on the limiting of these reforms to Hindus, Dr. S. Gopal, historian and biographer of Nehru, has said: "There are certain steps which, under pressure of circumstances, Nehru took or failed to take, which do not fit squarely with his promotion of secularism as the root of equality and the basis of democracy. Special treatment of minorities is in itself a weakening of the secular ideal...In his keenness to win the confidence of the Muslim community, he failed to provide equality before the law to all Indian women and to promulgate a common civil law. But there is no room in a secular society for

inequalities which claim religious sanction. To deny rights to Muslim women which are available to women of other faiths is a violation of the provision in the Constitution that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion." (Paper read at Seminar on 'Jawaharlal Nehru and India's Quest for a Secular Identity', New Delhi, 12th April 1987.)

A close friend of Asaf Ali's, Mohammad Currimbhoy Chagla (one-time Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court who succeeded Asaf Ali as ambassador in Washington and later served in the Union Cabinet) wrote in his autobiography: "I have often strongly disagreed with the Government policy of constantly harping upon minorities, minority status and minority rights. It comes in the way of national unity...Of course, it may serve well as a vote-catching device to win Muslim votes, but I do not believe in sacrificing national interests in order to get temporary party benefits...I am horrified to find that in my country, while monogamy has been made the law for the Hindus, Muslims can still indulge in the luxury of polygamy. It is an insult to womanhood, and Muslim women, I know, resent this discrimination between Muslim women and Hindu women."<sup>2</sup>

Another advocate of promoting monogamy among Muslims was M. Mujeeb, whose book on 'The Indian Muslims' has been cited earlier. Referring to the prohibition of bigamy in the conduct rules for civil servants, he pointed out in the course of his inaugural address at a Seminar on Islamic Law in Modern India in January 1972 that there "has been no opposition from the Muslims against the law which forbids a government servant to have more than one wife." Prof. Mujeeb suggested that "the law could be extended to cover those employed in institutions receiving governmental grants and further still to those dependent on government assistance in any form."

However, the Muslim community continues, by and large, to be under the sway of conservative and male chauvinist leaders. The reason was perceptively analysed by Baharul Islam, a retired judge of the Supreme Court and member of the Rajya Sabha, in the course of the fourth Motilal Nehru Memorial Lecture delivered by him on 9th December 1987. "The Muslim intelligentsia", he said, "are in a dilemma. They do not have sufficient contact with Muslim masses. The latter do not follow them, but are easily misled by the ulema who talk to them politics in terms of religion. Paradoxically, the Muslim intelligentsia are also not much needed by the political parties unless they are fanatical enough to influence the Muslim masses who constitute the vote banks. The result is that the progressive Muslim leadership is torn between nationalism and communalism, between conscience and convenience."

The tendency to woo Muslim votes through the conservative leaders of the community is not confined to any single political party, or to the Right or the Left. In 1969, the then Communist-led coalition government of Kerala, in which the Muslim League was a partner, carved out a new Muslim-majority district of Malappuram amidst protests from those who feared that such actions

might generate movements for the separation of new 'Muslim homelands' from already partitioned India.

On 11th May 1983, Indira Gandhi,<sup>3</sup> leader of the majority wing of the Congress party that was named after her as Congress (Indira) or Congress(I) for short, after the 1969 split, put down a note for her Home Minister. She said in the course of this note, which incorporated a 15-point programme for the minorities: "From my earliest childhood I have been committed to the secular ideal...I have met several delegations of Members of Parliament and other representatives of Muslims and other minority groups, and have discussed measures to prevent the recurrence of communal violence and to improve the economic conditions of minorities. After careful consideration of the suggestions which emerged, I have decided that immediate action should be taken as indicated below..." Some items in the 15-point programme assume that only Muslims can be trusted to look after Muslim interests and to protect Muslim lives and property. Thus: "In the recruitment of police personnel, State Governments should be advised to give special consideration to minorities. For this purpose, the composition of selection committees should be representative. The Central Government should take similar action in the recruitment of personnel to the Central police forces."

In 1985 there was a howl of protest from backward-looking, male chauvinist leaders of the Muslim community against the unanimous judgement of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case that a Muslim husband, like other Indian citizens, was bound to provide maintenance to a divorced wife who was in need. Even a highly educated Muslim woman belonging to the Congress (I), Dr. Najma Heptullah who was Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, defended the Islamic practice according to which the husband's responsibility for a wife divorced by him ceased with the period of *iddat*. The then Congress (I) Government at the Centre headed by Rajiv Gandhi bowed before the voices of unreason. It brought forward legislation, ironically titled the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, to nullify the effect of the Supreme Court's judgement. The Act makes it the duty of everyone except the husband to provide maintenance to a divorced and needy wife.

Asaf Ali's attitude to the status and rights of women, including Muslim women, was very different. When a non-official Muslim Dissolution of Marriage Bill moved by Qazi Muhammad Ahmed Kazmi was under discussion in the Central Legislative Assembly in August 1938, Asaf Ali said: "I am entirely in favour of the principle which underlies Clause 3, that is to say, I do want the Muslim women's right to seek dissolution of marriage to be restored to them. It has been denied for a long time under the Anglo-Muhammadan law." The Clause envisaged the grant of divorce to a Muslim woman if the husband was absconding, or there was no provision for her maintenance, or on the ground of the husband's cruelty.

On Clause 6 which provided that "the judicial officer must be a Mussal-

man", Asaf Ali expressed his preference for arbitration over litigation. He said: "If you are going to have assessors or jurors at all (what I am going to say has nothing to do with religion – I am speaking merely as a rational human being), I should like those jurors and assessors to be women rather than men, so that they may be able to judge of the distress and the suffering of the poor women who want to take advantage of this provision."

In this spirit, and in contrast to the generality of Congress M.P.s – Hindu and Muslim, men and women – who acquiesced in the opportunist and reactionary Muslim Women's Bill, a progressive-minded Muslim member of the Congress (I), Arif Mohammad Khan, expressed himself against the legislation. He was first dismissed from Rajiv Gandhi's Council of Ministers and subsequently expelled from the Congress party.

The 1991 elections to the Lok Sabha were remarkable for the competitive wooing of the religious minorities by all the major political parties other than the Bharatiya Janata Party. Branded by the others as a 'Hindu-communal' organisation, the BJP declared itself in 1991, as it had done earlier in its manifesto for the 1989 elections, in favour of equal rights for all citizens and appeasement of none. The Congress (I), on the other hand, promised protection to minorities, and measures to "remove the prevailing sense of insecurity and fear among minorities and infuse confidence in them." The manifesto promised to provide a statutory basis for the Minorities Commission. (The BJP envisaged its replacement by a Human Rights Commission to look into complaints of injustice against any section of society – as recommended by the Minorities Commission itself in 1982 when it had as its chairman Mirza Hameedullah Beg, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.)

Though Article 44 of the Constitution requires that the State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code, the National Front (of which the Janata Dal was the main constituent) pledged itself in its manifesto to "complete non-interference" in the personal laws of minorities. The National Front was at one on this point with its rival the Congress (I), which said in its manifesto that it would desist from alteration of personal laws of the minorities until there is "an unequivocal demand by the section of people governed by the concerned laws". Like the Congress (I), the Front envisaged statutory status for the Minorities Commission. Additionally, it promised exemption of wakf properties from rent control laws.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) promised "protection of life and property of minorities during riots", thus suggesting that minorities never provoke but are always the victims of communal riots. Wittingly or unwittingly, the major political parties except the BJP have tended to create an impression, which has no basis in fact, that Indian Muslims are an endangered species. The proportion of Muslims in the total population of post-partition India has grown steadily from Census to ten-yearly Census, from 9.91% at the 1951 head count to 11.35% in 1981. (The religious break-up of India's population at the 1991



Census is not yet available.) This is partly due to a higher rate of natural increase in the Muslim population, and partly to a net excess of in-migration over out-migration – apart from a small number of conversions. The biggest inflow of Muslims into India has been from Bangladesh, which has the unhappy distinction of having an even lower per capita income than India. This has generated the fear, in some quarters, of Muslim predominance in districts of India's West Bengal which adjoin Bangladesh.

The latest instance of the professedly secular political parties keeping alive and strengthening the sense of a separate Muslim identity is the conferment of statutory status, and the powers of a civil court (summoning of witnesses including officials, documents etc.) on the Minorities Commission. On 12th May 1992 the Union Welfare Minister Sitaram Kesri, treasurer of the Congress for thirteen years, said with unabashed candour during a newspaper interview (*Indian Express*, Delhi, 21st May 1992) that the empowerment of the Minorities Commission was designed to win back the Muslim vote bank for the Congress.

The Islamic factor in the Indian sub-continent's politics has not been without its effect on external relations. The new State of Pakistan, like most of the Muslim countries of West Asia, aligned itself with the Anglo-American camp in the Cold War. And the West, during consideration of the Kashmir issue in the United Nations, equated Pakistan the aggressor with India the victim of aggression. This reinforced the pro-Soviet inclination of the Nehru Government, which turned to the U.S.S.R. for support. Part of the syndrome of India's foreign policy during the Cold War, and specially in relation to Israel, was a strongly pro-Arab stance, sometimes in contrast to and sometimes in competition with Pakistan. But India has not secured the expected gain from pro-Arabism. The Organisation of Islamic States has been backing Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, as most recently in December 1991 at Dakar, the Senegalese capital.

The Gulf War of early 1991 saw a resurgence of pan-Islamic sentiment which coincided with the anti-Americanism of the Communists and some others. In scenes that called to mind the Khilafat movement, members of the Jamia Millia Teachers Association demonstrated at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi demanding stoppage of the hostilities against Iraq (Saddam Hussein seemed to many Muslims a modern counterpart of the Khalif based in Turkey during World War I.) After a Friday prayer gathering at the Jama Masjid in the third week of January 1991, a crowd of about 500 Muslims, joined by workers of the Janata Dal (principal constituent of the National Front), which is stridently 'secular', burnt effigies of President Bush of the U.S.A. On the same day there was a protest rally at the U.S. Embassy in which activists of the two Communist parties and their front organisations participated. The Khilafat analogy was heightened by a report on 12th February from Washington, by the United News of India news agency, that a group calling itself the United

American Muslims for Peace had advised young Muslim citizens of the U.S. to seek 'conscientious objection' status if they were drafted for military service. "We are loyal to nobody except Allah", the group said.

Early in 1992, four decades after India's recognition of the new State of Israel in September 1950, the Government decided to establish diplomatic relations. This provoked criticism by the Muslim League. Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait, president of the Indian Union Muslim League, said that the decision was wrong and went against the aspirations of the Palestinian people and the Arabs. (The Muslim League is an ally, in the Indian parliament, of the ruling Congress party which does not command an absolute majority.) Other critics included the Communists, as also Prof. M.S. Agwani, the Muslim vice-chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University (a Central university funded by the Union Government). He said in the course of an article in *The Times of India* that the Government's decision was a sequel to the Indian vote in the U.N. on 16th December 1991 reversing the 1975 General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism, and warned that America was seeking to "pit India against the Muslim world". The pan-Islamist and anti-Zionist reactions during 1991-92 were reminiscent of the Muslim League's criticism of Asaf Ali's plea in the U.N., at its special session in April 1947, that the Jewish side be heard along with the Palestinian and other Arab spokesmen.

It is noteworthy that, against the background of the tendency of professedly secular political parties to keep alive the sense of a separate identity among Muslims, some nationalist Muslims have chosen to affiliate themselves with a party which the others brand as 'Hindu-communal' – the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, and its successor the present Bharatiya Janata Party.

The Jana Sangh was formed in 1951, on the eve of the first general elections, by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerji who had resigned from the Indian Cabinet in protest against what he regarded as Prime Minister Nehru's weak handling of problems with Pakistan, in particular the forced exodus of large numbers of Hindus from Pakistan's eastern wing (now Bangladesh). Dr. Mookerji wanted to promote a political party as an alternative to the Congress, but it was to be a nationalist and not a Hindu-communal alternative. He tried to persuade the Hindu Mahasabha, with which he had been connected, to throw its membership open to all Indian citizens. Failing in this attempt, he formed the Jana Sangh. Dr. Mookerji launched an agitation against Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which conferred a special constitutional status on Jammu & Kashmir. He held that this provision had encouraged Sheikh Abdullah to nurture ambitions of establishing his own Sheikhdom. Dr. Mookerji died in June 1953 while in detention in Kashmir. Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah was dismissed from office and arrested shortly afterwards, in August 1953, on the charge of conspiring to take J & K out of India. This appeared to many to confirm the fears expressed by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerji.

An early Muslim member of the Jana Sangh was Dr. Moazziz Ali Beg,

then a Reader in the Department of Psychology, Aligarh Muslim University. He saw in the Jana Sangh a vehicle for reviving, and carrying forward in contemporary conditions, the heritage of Bhakti-Sufism. In the course of a newspaper article in 1974, he said: "Repressive capitalism, socialism and communism are all expressions of an evolving spiral of nihilism which is self-destructive. Unfortunately the Congress-I which is presently handling the government machinery in open alliance with the communists seems to be wedded to these nihilistic disciplines. On the contrary, the ideology to which the Jana Sangh is committed is a contradiction of nihilism and throws out a formidable challenge to it. It has its philosophical moorings in the preachings, writings and sayings of Krishna, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Chisti, Nanak, Vivekananda, Ram Tirtha and Iqbal of 'Hindustan Hamara' fame...I am convinced through my experience of the past decade and a half that the tag of 'minority character' can never save the Aligarh Muslim University from the defacement of its identity which is going on under the increasing pressures of nihilism, communism, anti-religious and anti-patriotic forces...The Jana Sangh wants to replace nihilism with integral humanism which definitely guarantees a safe place to religion, to Indian culture, to ethical and spiritual values, and above all to a stable framework of morality."<sup>4</sup>

After Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed a fascist-type 'internal emergency' on the country during 1975-76, the Jana Sangh merged into the Janata Party that was formed in order to give a united fight--which proved successful--to the Congress (Indira) in the elections held early in 1977. When the Janata Party and its government broke down soon afterwards owing to internal dissension, the Jana Sangh re-emerged as a distinct political party under the name of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Though it fared poorly thereafter in terms of seats in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies, the BJP steadily increased its share of the popular vote till it emerged as a major force on the national scene in the 1989 general elections and again in 1991.

Aizaj Rizvi is another early Jana Sangh member and is now a Minister in the BJP Government of Uttar Pradesh. He was earlier practising before the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court as a criminal lawyer. Asked by a newspaper representative how he kept company with the BJP which is considered by other political parties as anti-Muslim and communal, Aizaj Rizvi said: "I joined the BJP in 1974 because I found it to be better than other parties. To dub the BJP as communal is wrong. Such propaganda is carried out by pseudo-secularists to hoodwink the gullible electorate for votes. The BJP is not communal. It is pro-India and wants all citizens to be pro-India."

One of the Vice Presidents of the BJP is Sikander Bakht. He is the most prominent nationalist Muslim outside the professedly secular parties. Sikander Bakht had the courage to say during the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, in the accents of the Sufi saints: "I am a Ram Bhakt before I am a Sikander Bakht." He was speaking at Hisar, a town near Delhi, on 3rd April

1991 on the eve of a BJP rally in the capital in support of the construction of a temple at a site at Ayodhya which is believed to have been the birthplace of Rama and where now stands a mosque named for Babur who invaded India in the 1520's. In the spirit of the early Iqbal, Sikander Bakht hailed Rama as part of a glorious Indian heritage which is shared by Muslims. He said that Muslims in post-1947 India should feel grateful that they have been granted equal rights even though most Muslims had backed the demand for partition of the sub-continent. On another occasion Sikander Bakht deplored the fact that the Constitution of India, a secular republic, takes note of and makes special provisions regarding 'religious minorities'.

But the position of the nationalist Muslim is not much easier in the BJP than it is in what the BJP calls the pseudo-secular political parties. As a prominent journalist has remarked, "The BJP for its part has been playing the Hindu card to an extent that must have embarrassed its few Muslim candidates, office-bearers (including a Vice President) and members."<sup>5</sup> Altogether, the lot of Nationalist Muslims continues to be lonely. However, an encouraging feature of the political scene in the 1990's is that Muslims no longer constitute an undifferentiated vote bank but are beginning to make a political choice, as is only appropriate in a plural polity.

To recollect the life and work of M. Asaf Ali should be an encouragement both to Muslims and non-Muslims to hold to humane values transcending the differences of religion – as of language, ethnicity and customs – that members of the Family of Man inherit by the accident of their birth in a particular family at a given place and time. Asaf Ali had many forerunners in the tradition of an inclusive humanism. The country and the world need many more such to keep alive and to carry forward the tradition.

## NOTES

1. *In Different Saddles* by M.R.A. Baig, Asia Publishing House, 1967.
2. *Roses in December* by M.C. Chagla, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1973.
3. Daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira was no relation of the Mahatma. Her husband Feroze, belonging to the Allahabad branch of a Bombay-based family of Parsis, used to spell his surname as 'Gandhy' till the time of his marriage in March 1942. Thereafter the spelling was changed to 'Gandhi'.
4. *The Motherland*, Delhi, 23rd February 1974.
5. P. Unnikrishnan in an article on 'Statist Economics, Divisive Policies and Populist Politics', *Economic Review*, Colombo, July-August 1991.

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